

# Nature of Professional Inquiry: An Evaluation of Four Types of Professional Inquiry Methods

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## **1.1. Introduction**

Professional inquiry can be characterised as the process of 'finding out' or the steps followed to conduct an 'investigation' by an individual with the end goal of increasing reflection based and personal assessment-based practices (Lim et al., 2019). There are different types of professional inquiry methods. This research intends to evaluate four different forms of professional inquiry including scientific inquiry, appreciative inquiry, dialectic inquiry and narrative inquiry. This research intends to present a comprehensive assessment of professional inquiry practices within the context of business management within the sporting sector. Given that the researcher has had some experience of working as an intern within a sports media organisation, reflections on their own learning in reference to the four theoretical bases of professional inquiry is carried out.

## **1.2. Scientific Inquiry**

Inquiry is the fundamental process involved in science-based education and is the most common type of education that is followed currently in the world. However, despite its large usage among the general population, there is still no clear definition of the term scientific inquiry. Most often, the term inquiry gets mixed with 'scientific method'. The purpose of this essay is intended at evaluating different types of professional inquiry methods and arrive at key outcomes

A scientific method is a process that involves a series of steps that flow from asking a question to determining the answers. The most commonly accepted definition for scientific inquiry is the pursuit of coherent, mechanistic accounts of natural phenomena (Husnaini and Chen, 2019). Scientific inquiry can be found to be used in various forms of life or fields ranging from education to political science, geophysics etc. The fundamental principles that are a part of scientific inquiry remain the same regardless of where scientific inquiry is being conducted. However, it must be noted that there are no fixed set of principles associated with all scientific inquiry. There are certain general principles used in relation to scientific inquiry which are to provide proper references and citations to ensure that content validity can be checked, to ensure that the research in question must be linked to a relevant theory, to ask research questions which can be analysed using empirical evidence, to adopt

methods which allows direct investigation of the research question, to provide a coherent and detailed chain of reasoning and to ensure that the results must be replicable and must be applicable to a larger population (Cigdemoglu and Koseoglu, 2019).

The process of scientific inquiry has four goals. The first objective of a scientific inquiry is to help individuals understand a particular concept or phenomenon. The process of scientific inquiry always proceeds on an incremental basis which starts from developing a research hypothesis to collecting evidence to support the hypothesis, to testing the hypothesis and finally getting an answer which may either prove or disprove the hypothesis (Zyphur and Pierides, 2019). A scientific inquiry can be conducted using multiple methods and as such is flexible in nature. Various types of questions require different approaches and evaluations. Furthermore, there are different ways to answer a particular research question. The general consensus among people is that science automatically means experimentation. Although experimentation is a part of the scientific inquiry process, observations, surveys, and other methods are also a part of the scientific inquiry process. The second goal is to provide individuals with an opportunity to practice and refine their critical thinking abilities. This is vital as it will help individuals make a decision and will also teach them the decision-making process. The third goal is to convey a sense of scientific research and the rigours involved in it to individuals (Kim and Choi, 2019). The use of scientific inquiry has been useful in my learning from my workplace, especially when I have been asked to prepare reports. I was asked to conduct an evaluation of the impact of technology in changes in sporting management and strategy to contribute to an article. This analysis involved collecting information through established peer reviewed papers, published surveys as well as collecting information through observations.

There are a few limitations associated with scientific inquiry. One limitation is the requirement that a scientific inquiry must involve the development of a hypothesis and the testing of the hypothesis which in turn must be replicable. This means that tests have to have a degree of consistency which automatically eliminates the possibility of testing various phenomenon (Redish et al., 2018). For instance, this type of inquiry cannot be used to answer some questions which cannot be proven through theory. For example, despite access to various literature on the determinants of sportsman performance, there continues to remain a factor which cannot be quantified, including

their emotional outlook on a specific day (Slobodchikova et al. 2020). I believe that scientific inquiry may not be as effective when one has to understand why certain type of observations are made (Alfano, 2017).

Clearly, the scientific method is a powerful tool, but it does have its limitations. These limitations are based on the fact that a hypothesis must be testable and falsifiable and that experiments, and observations be repeatable (Hanauer et al., 2006). This places certain topics beyond the reach of the scientific method. For example, science cannot prove or refute the existence of an additional sportsman specific factor which may contribute to their performance. Any hypothesis to test this point of interest would not be repeatable since faith and emotions are subjective and can vary greatly. Therefore, while scientific inquiry is useful in some situations, it may not apply to all situations.

### **1.3. Dialectical Inquiry**

Dialectical inquiry is a group decision making technique. This type of inquiry was originally introduced by Plato who asked his pupils to consider both sides to an argument (Berniker and McNabb, 2006). The fundamental point of a dialectical inquiry is to consider both the positives and the negatives of an idea. Equal thought is given to understanding a given idea from different perspectives (Sanday, 2017). Dialectical inquiry also can be called as dialectical research or investigation. Generally, dialectical inquiry comes under qualitative research. The process of carrying out a dialectical inquiry involves examining the truth of a phenomenon by investigating the competitive ideas, thoughts and arguments of the research phenomenon or subject in question. A dialectical inquiry also can take an exploratory approach and does not necessarily have to have a hypothesis to be tested (Sanday, 2017). Instead, a dialectical inquiry can work with abstract ideas and arguments rather than on cold hard empirical evidence.

The most common way in which a dialectical inquiry is conducted is to form two groups of individuals. Each of these groups will be assigned a task on evaluating and analysing one side of the research question or research phenomenon. There can be more than two groups. A research phenomenon or question may require multiple perspectives. Thus, the onus is on the manager who is in charge of assigning the various groups their area of focus (Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2017). The use of dialectic inquiry has been useful as part of our team debates as well as intern specific

programmes offered by the organisation. We have been asked to present alternative views on different subjects and express them as debates and position papers. For example, one of the papers that I did was to evaluate if dependence on analytics has been truly useful for coaches to improve performance of athletes. I argued for the position where another intern argued against the position. This type of sharing of information helped increase my overall knowledge and the need to critically assess the information.

There are a number of benefits associated with using a dialectical approach to inquiry. These include the fact that a diverse range of ideas can be explored using a dialectical inquiry method. Furthermore, using this approach allows a particular group or an individual to stress on a critical point of view. Using this approach allows for bridging seemingly irreconcilable opposites. It is also possible to incentivise a particular group to come up with creative factors or perspectives which can be beneficial and can allow a whole new look at a particular problem (Hoon and Baluch, 2020). This definitely worked for me as I was able to conduct a comprehensive assessment of a specific subject from different views. The dialectic inquiry method is regarded in greater esteem amongst certain circles. One such area is in the strategic planning of businesses (Johnson, 2017). This approach is extensively used by managers and strategists to cover all possible scenarios and form a decision based on multiple predictions. By using a dialectic inquiry approach, the business planners hope to gain an understanding on the organization's environment, its personal values, its resources and its social responsibility. In addition to this, this approach is also used to identify conflict areas within the business and also to resolve it (Ryan, 2018).

There are certain limitations associated with dialectic inquiry as well. This inquiry methodology can have a problem when one of the groups decide to take a well known and tried and tested approach to resolve a problem. The primary issue with this is that the whole purpose of using a dialectical approach is to generate more ideas from the group. If the entire group adopts a safe approach, then the purpose of this inquiry will be defeated. At the same time, there are certain situations where a group decides that a risky approach is the best way forward which can involve making mistakes and taking longer to solve a problem. Thus, it must be acknowledged that just because a dialectic approach is taken, it does not necessarily mean that the right solution will always be

found. There are chances that bias and institutional beliefs can still override this approach. The decision-making process can sometimes begin under the guise of certain assumptions. Therefore, the assumptions made at the start can have a significant sway on how the meetings ends. The aptitude of the leader responsible for influencing the team plays a major role in the outcome of such approaches. If the method of decision-making that the group shall be employing is not an agreed upon process to begin with, then the group may already be at a disadvantage (Shannon and Frischherz, 2020).

#### **1.4. Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based approach to bring about an organisational change. This is provided by a positive environment that supports in building strong leadership skills in individuals and encourages the development of collaborative work environment (Bushe, 2012). Furthermore, AI specifically hints towards: The AI paradigm and AI methodology and initiatives. The AI paradigm refers to the ideologies, assumptions and standards that give rise to the strengths-based change approach. The AI methodology and initiatives refers to the specific approaches and operational moves that help in creating a positive work environment which supports affirmative changes within the system (Grieten et al., 2018). In the recent past, supporters of AI have assumed that this approach is turning into a deficit-based approach. According to them, this approach is developing into an undesirable one as it majorly concentrates on mending the issues that arise within the organisation. This intense problem-solving outlook of the organisation to enhance their effectiveness, performance levels, competitive spirit, and existence in general can become detrimental to the organisation's survival (Ohmer et al., 2018).

However, AI proved these assumptions wrong and demonstrated the positive effects that this approach can have on the organisation. This strengths-based approach seemingly comes to perceive how the strengths and core values of each and every human system within the organisation can benefit that organisation. The core values and strengths supported by this approach are immensely similar to the organisational strengths perspective in the traditional management literature. Collectively, this includes: the values; viewpoints; and capacities of an organisation that has helped

them reach the pinnacle of success, and the collective interpretation of the organisation about their strengths that has led to their success (Whitney et al., 2019).

The AI process moves through four different phases which is referred to as the 4-D cycle. The steps in this process include: Discovery; Dream; Design; and Destiny. The discovery step deals with analysing the organisation's strengths; winning ideologies; endurance levels, top-level performances; and sources of excellence (Bushe, 2012). The next step in the 4-D cycle is dream that deals with what kind of future the organisation foresees for itself, to reach a point of unconditional engagement and outright success. The design step talks about how the participants bring together the aspects of their self-discovery and dream to develop highly effective strategies that push the organisation towards an advantageous position (Bushe, 2012). The final step which is destiny talks about how the participants make use of these strategies in the best possible manner by allowing flexibility to make changes whenever required in the process (Lewis, 2020).

Appreciative inquiry in my organisation was supported through support for individual reflexive learning and engagement with a mentor. For example, through appreciation there was identification of the qualities of people that help them outshine. Appreciative inquiry recognised my strengths and my contribution to the organisation as a whole, which further assists the organisation in creating a strong framework for building powerful future prospects. Such an appreciation leads to self-driven inquiry (Schutt Jr, 2018). We are asked to question any aspect which did not make sense. The questioning attitude in participants instils a learning mindset in them and it further conditions their curious nature and thirst for discovery (Scandura, 2017). Wholeness is the third and final leg that supports the AI process. This strengthens the spirit of participation within the entire organisation and encourages everyone in the organisation to share their ideologies. This is important because; outstanding ideas arise out of unanticipated encounters. Furthermore, AI also supports the idea of obtaining the viewpoints of participants outside the organisation to engender a holistic outlook of the processes within the system (Cockell et al., 2020).

A potential challenge with this approach as identified by Bergmark and Kostenius (2018), is that it may tend to focus on optimist perspectives rather than adopt a holistic



analysis. According to the critics, it is not a good idea to concentrate only on the strengths of the organisation, individual, or community and ignore issues associated with them while carrying out the decision-making process. This creates a disproportionate interpretation of the issues prevalent within the system. Furthermore, individuals might come to a perception that their problems and issues are being underestimated. Moreover, the AI approach does not fit well into a system whose intention is directed towards simply gathering evidence or a straightforward evaluation of their processes. AI only works well in places where a whole-system process is contemplated (De Jong, 2020). I think that while appreciative inquiry can help if there is organisation level adoption of such inquiry practices, at the level of the intern, there were limited options.

### **1.5. Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is the way of capturing information via research activities and expressing the experience in the form of stories. People's lives are believed to be a compilation of stories and these stories are explained by the researcher in the narrative inquiry by studying human experiences (Clandinin et al., 2018). Some of the tools used to carry out narrative inquiry are field notes, interviews, journals, letters, autobiographies, and orally told stories. For instance: When a researcher intends to study the social roles of fourth grade girls in school, they might make use of tools such as notes, journal entries and interviews ((Rhodes and Brown, 2005). The girls can be interviewed and observations can be recorded. With these details and observations, a researcher can develop a narrative. Furthermore, a research is believed to narrate the lives of the researcher in association with that of the participant and bring this together as a single document (Caine et al., 2017).

Although stories are given a theoretical outlook, it is mostly used to interpret a particular point, as part of a lecture or a seminar (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). In this case, a story is still manifested as an illusory and intuitive representation of a point, which is spoken in an informal setup. Some of the data sources in a narrative inquiry are: recorded field observations of shared experiences; journal records of participants; interviews, which is unstructured in most cases; storytelling; letter writing; autobiographical and biographical writing (Smith, 2017). The researcher must take into account the following points while carrying out a narrative inquiry: pay attention to

the stories narrated by the participants; recognise the mutual relationship between the stories told by the researcher and the participants; accept the fact that while the participants' are narrating their life stories to others, they are also living the same life in real (Rhodes and Brown, 2005).

In case of professional education, the ideologies that support characteristics of a good nurse or an outstanding teacher are got out of stories of the past that have narrated this idea (Head, 2020). A number of ethical and methodological challenges arise in a narrative approach on account of anonymity and confidentiality. When more and more number of respondents are encouraged to take part in a research study, the sensitivity towards ethical issues becomes higher. For instance: When a study of relationships or a network that involves many actors is undertaken, there are possibilities of business relationships being disrupted. This is because; some parties may recognise the real faces behind these stories which may cause negative exposures of these actors. Furthermore, confidentiality issues many arise when a number of voices and narrations are used in research reporting (Clandinin et al., 2018). Some of the other challenges related to the data gathering and reporting process are the procedural rules engulfing the interview process; sensitivity issues and ethics. As the participants are more inclined towards structured interviews, the respondents get enough freedom to express their thoughts during a narrative interview. However, this freedom on part of the narrator can lead to a lot of "waste time" and it becomes the duty of the researcher to bring back the narrator into narrating within the confines of the research area. Following are a summary of the challenges in the process of narrative inquiry: To work in line with the unconventional style of interview, anonymity in reporting, ethical issues, biased situations, ontology (Bell, 2002).

While narrative inquiry presented itself as an opportunity which can help me gather direct data from specific participants as part of my intern project, there were significant challenges that I faced. In this way, by narrating these stories to practicing students in such professions, they are encouraged to follow certain means of practice. Furthermore, stories which represent good practice create an issue while representing life related situations. However, many individuals do not truly present the entire story.. As stories are a direct representation of a person's identity, problems are bound to arise while life situations are represented using stories.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

Overall, I believe that as part of reflexive learning as well as professional development, I have used all the forms of professional inquiry. I personally believe that scientific inquiry can be most useful in situations where clear hypotheses have to be proved and when there is opportunity for complete objectivity. I found dialectic inquiry to be useful in debating multiple positions and identifying various ways to approaching a problem. Appreciative inquiry helped me understand positive aspects of my own capabilities and how I can use this to help the organisation. Finally, narrative inquiry was most effective in conducting storytelling. However, the concept of storytelling is not as easy as it is perceived to be. There are many reasons behind this complexity. The complicated nature of storytelling can be attributed to the various sounds and voices used in the process. In addition to this, stories can be used to test the degree of authenticity of certain happenings and it can also be used as a way to introduce control mechanism.

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