

synergy workshop 2012

Mixed methodology in Health Psychology: using Pragmatism to overcome the 'irreconcilable epistemological differences' between quantitative and qualitative methods



This year's SYNERGY workshop on mixed methodology aimed to advance our understanding of applying qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in an integrated and synergistic fashion to health psychology research. The 3 day workshop was led by Dr Rachel Shaw & Professor Paul Flowers, two experts in the field of mixed methodologies. The workshop covered a wide range of topics relevant to mixed methodology including a particular focus on epistemological differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, and ways of overcoming these within mixed methods research studies. In addition to theoretical and methodological issues surrounding mixed methods research, the workshop introduced the UK Medical Research Council's (MRC) complex interventions development framework to explore and guide the development of mixed methods approaches to research projects. This was attained through small group work which provided a context for applying the covered mixed methodology approaches to practically relevant health psychology research. Moreover, participants were able to bring their own research projects, challenges and experiences into the workshop environment to centre discussion on issues most relevant to participants.

The workshop was not only well organised and thought provoking, but also an extremely useful exercise to reflect on one's own overall approach to health psychology research, which for many participants included using either qualitative or quantitative methods. By consid-

ering what could be gained by embracing other methodologies in an integrative fashion the potential for improving health psychology research became apparent, and many different ways of achieving integrative mixed methods research were discussed. Additionally, as mixed methods research has only relatively recently become established as a research approach, the challenges in obtaining sufficient expertise in various different research methodologies with a view to truly integrating approaches became apparent. More high quality and collaborative research is needed to advance this new development and establish it as a mainstream approach within health psychology methodology.

Overall, the relaxed and productive atmosphere combined with the flexible delivery of the workshop content made the 3 days enjoyable and relevant for participants. The overall level of expertise of the workshop facilitators as well as the participants ensured stimulating debates, which persisted despite the increasingly tropical temperatures in Prague that week (there were rumours that the last workshop day was the hottest day in the history of Prague ever recorded). What the workshop allowed me personally was, in addition to getting to know a great bunch of people, to question my habitual approaches to designing research and to embrace other research methods with a view of integrating these in order to improve the overall quality and ultimately the impact of health psychological science. ■

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