

Glossary

action learning A form of management development which, in essence, involves 'learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning-to-learn by doing' (Revans, 1980: 288). The process is inductive rather than deductive as managers are asked to solve actual organizational problems. It crucially depends upon the 'set' or group as a vehicle for learning by its members with a 'set adviser' to facilitate progress. Its variants in situations throughout the world are described by Revans (1980).

analysis The processes by which a phenomenon (e.g. a managerial problem) is conceptualized so that it is separated into its component parts and the interrelationships between those parts, and their contribution to the whole, elucidated.

analytic induction A research methodology concerned with the inductive development and testing of theory.

a priori Prior to, and independent of, experience or observation.

cognition The act or process of knowing.

concepts Abstractions which allow us to order our impressions of the world by enabling us to identify similarities and differences in phenomena and thereby classify them.

consensus theory of truth The notion that the veracity of an account or theory is determinable only through agreement between the researcher and his or her professional peers, or between the researcher and the subjects of his or her research.

control group A group of subjects in an experiment who do not experience the action of the independent variable or experimental treatment.

conventionalism Another term to describe the consensus theory of truth.

correspondence theory of truth A notion that the truthfulness of an account or a theory is determinable by direct comparison with the facts of an external and accessible reality. If they fail to correspond the theory or account must be rejected.

deduction The deduction of particular instances from general inferences. It entails the development of a conceptual and theoretical structure which is then tested by observation.

dependent variable The phenomenon whose variation the researcher is trying to explain or understand.

emic A form of explanation of a situation or events that relies upon elucidation of actors' internal logics or subjectivity.

empiricism The idea that valid knowledge is directly derived from sense-data and experience.

epistemology The branch of philosophy concerned with the study of the criteria by which we determine what does and does not constitute warranted or valid knowledge.

etic A form of analysis which relies upon explanations that impose an external logic or frame of reference upon subjects so as to explain their behaviour.

experimental group A group of subjects in an experiment who experience the action of the independent variable or experimental treatment.

extraneous variable A phenomenon whose variation might cause some variation in the dependent variable and thus provide rival explanations of any observed variability in the dependent variable to that suggested by the independent variable.

grounded theory The outcome of inductive research, that is, theory created or discovered through the observation of particular cases.

hermeneutic circle The notion that no observation or description is free from the observer's interpretation based upon his or her presuppositions and projection of his or her values, theories, etc., on to phenomena.

hypothesis A tentative proposal that explains and predicts the variation in a particular phenomenon.

ideographic An approach to social science that emphasizes that explanation of human behaviour is possible only through gaining access to actors' subjectivity or culture.

independent variable A phenomenon whose variation notionally explains or causes changes in the dependent variable.

indexicality The problem that people vary their behaviour according to their interpretation of the situation in which they find themselves.

induction General inferences induced from particular instances, or the development of theory from the observation of empirical reality.

methodology The study of the methods or procedures used in a discipline so as to gain warranted knowledge.

multivariate analysis A generic term for the use of various statistical procedures to indicate the amount of variance in the dependent variable which can be attributed to the action of each independent and extraneous variable.

naturalism This term can have two opposing meanings:

- 1 That the methodologies of the natural and physical sciences (e.g. physics) provide a blueprint that should be followed by the social sciences.
- 2 The necessity to investigate human action in its natural or everyday setting and that the researcher must avoid disturbing that setting.

nomothetic Approaches to social science that seek to construct a deductively tested set of general theories that explain and predict human behaviour.

objectivism See realism.

ontology The study of the essence of phenomena and the nature of their existence.

operationalization The creation of rules which indicate when an instance of a concept has empirically occurred.

paradigm Usually taken to mean a way of looking at some phenomenon. A perspective from which distinctive conceptualizations and explanations of phenomena are proposed.

phenomenology A study of how things appear to people – how people experience the world.

positivism Often classified as an approach that emphasizes the use of the methods presumed to be used in the natural sciences in the social sciences: the philosophical view that the social sciences should copy the natural sciences methodologically is often also called methodological monism. However, this type of definition of positivism rather misses the key characteristic of positivism – that positivists assume that it is possible to neutrally apprehend reality provided that the appropriate methods are used. In other words, positivism is best associated with the idea that scientists must only deal with the positively given – data that can be neutrally accessed through the deployment of a neutral observational language. It is precisely this assumption that is contested by those (for example, critical theorists, etc.) who wish to distance themselves from positivism, but it is an assumption often accepted by some of those who also use qualitative methods (i.e. qualitative positivists) and thereby have also rejected methodological monism.

practical adequacy Criterion that determines the truthfulness of knowledge through consideration of the extent to which such knowledge generates explanations regarding the results of human action that are actually realized. In other words, the extent to which knowledge is practically useful.

random sample A sample in which all members of the specific populations from

which the sample is drawn have an equal chance of selection.

realism May be divided into ontological/metaphysical realism and epistemological realism. Ontological/metaphysical realism considers that reality exists independently of the cognitive structures of observers, while epistemological realism considers that reality to be cognitively accessible to observers. Much of realism entails both views and where it does it is often called 'objectivism', i.e. there is a real social and natural world existing independently of our cognitions which we can neutrally apprehend through observation. However, other realists would claim that while reality does exist independently of our efforts to understand it, it is not cognitively accessible in a neutral manner. In other words, they accept metaphysical realism but combine it with a subjectivist view of epistemology which denies the possibility of a theory-neutral observational language.

reflexivity The monitoring by an ethnographer of his or her impact upon the social situation under investigation. This may be called situational reflexivity and can be contrasted with epistemological reflexivity where the observer attempts hermeneutically to reflect upon and articulate the assumptions he or she deploys in apprehending and interpreting his or her own observations.

relativism The notion that how things appear to people, and individuals' judgement about truth, are relative to their particular paradigm or frame of reference.

reliability A criterion that refers to the consistency of the results obtained in research.

theory A formulation regarding the cause-and-effect relationships between two or

more variables, which may or may not have been tested.

theory-dependent This term refers to the way in which human practical activities entail acting upon the imperatives deriving from theoretical conjectures about, and explanations of, phenomena.

theory-laden This term refers to the way in which the prior values, knowledge and theories of an observer influence what he or she sees during observation.

theory-neutral observation language The idea that it is possible to test precisely a theory through observation of empirical reality which is readily open to neutral inspection by the observer.

triangulation

- 1 The use of different research methods in the same study to collect data so as to check the validity of any findings.
- 2 The collection of different data upon the same phenomena, sometimes using different researchers so as to validate any findings.
- 3 Collecting data upon the same phenomenon at different times and places within the same study.

validity There are three types of validity:

- 1 Internal validity is the extent to which the conclusions regarding cause and effect are warranted.
- 2 Population validity is the extent to which conclusions might be generalized to other people.
- 3 Ecological validity is the extent to which conclusions might be generalized to social contexts other than those in which data have been collected.

verstehen A term used to refer to explanations of the actions of subjects by understanding the subjective dimensions of their behaviour.