When immersing oneself in the terminology associated with the underpinnings of research there are a number of complex philosophical terms that need to be understood. Please keep in mind that terms covered in this video are often debated, understood and communicated in multiple correct ways. To fully understand them, you need to further explore them using literature. A good starting point is the e-book on the website below this video.

**Paradigms**
Research or inquiry is guided by a set of beliefs. This set of beliefs or world view is known as paradigm. A paradigm is essentially a way of thinking about the world. ‘Gubba’ and Lincoln define a paradigm as basic belief system, based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. They assert that there is no way to prove that one paradigm is superior to the others. That is why they are debated. According to Gubba and Lincoln, these ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, are so interrelated ‘within’ paradigms that answering one question, limits how the others can be answered. Beliefs or views of the world around us have been debated throughout history in the field of philosophy, dating back at least as far as early Greece. The term ontology actually originates from the Greek word for ‘to be’.

**Ontology**
Ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of reality. In philosophical terms it refers to the study of our existence in the fundamental nature of reality or being. Beliefs about the nature of reality therefore determine what can be known about it. Questions related to ontology include ‘what exists?’, ‘what is true?’, and how can we ‘sort’ existing things?

**Epistemology**
Epistemology and methodology are driven by ontological beliefs. Epistemology is more philosophical in nature than methodology. It examines the relationship between knowledge and the researcher during discovery. It therefore refers to how we come to know what we know. Once ontological
beliefs will dictate how objective the relationship between the researcher and what can be known should be.

**Methodology**

Methodology is the way we discover knowledge in a systematic way. It is more specific and practice based than epistemology. The appropriate methodology is driven by ontological and epistemological beliefs, since methods like experiments and interviews have very ... of objectivity.

**Different research paradigms: positivism, constructivism, critical theory**

... examines the philosophical differences between the two dominant paradigms in research, which she labels as quantitative and qualitative. ‘Gubba’ and Lincoln on the other hand identify positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism as the major ... paradigms. Upon examination of these terms one can see that these two authors are talking about the same things in different ways.

**Ontology within the different paradigms**

To begin it is logical to discuss the ontology within each of these paradigms. From an ontological perspective, ‘...’ discusses two dominant perceptions of reality: realism and relativism. It is important to know that there are also perceptions of reality that fall in between these two strongly contrasting views of reality. Some terms used in the debate about reality have strong ontological similarity. There are also terms that have both ontological similarities and differences when compared.

**Realism**

Traditional science founded on a realist ontology uses experiments to find the truth or facts about reality. Realism is a belief that reality exists. It is driven by natural laws. This reality is objective, independent of any theories or human beliefs or human behaviour, and exists, even if it is not yet known. It is context free. Realism is the ontological perspective, within a quantitative of positivist research paradigm.

**Positivism and modernism**

Positivism is a paradigm of inquiry that searches for the truth or facts about reality. Within positivism there is a belief that there is an objective constant reality that exists and can be measured objectively. Since a reality exists that can be discovered the epistemology within positivism is objective in nature. This objectivity means that the researcher maintain distance from the researched in order to prevent any influences on the results. The methodology in this paradigm is therefore experimental or manipulative in nature. Hypotheses are tested and quantitative methods are used.
Measures are taken to control anything that may influence the research. Another term that is essentially the same as positivism is modernism. Modernism is based on generalize truths about reality. It emerged during the modern period in history where it was believed that reasoning, science and technology would improve our body of knowledge and wellbeing due to rational control of nature and society. Modernist search for certainty and permanent universal laws.

Relativism
Alternate ontologies have emerged that underpin newer paradigms of research. The strongest contrasting ontological perspective to realism is relativism. Research founded on relativism searches for meaning in the experiences of individuals. Relativism is a belief that reality cannot exist without context. Relativists belief that there are multiple mental constructions of reality. These realities are influenced by experiences, and social interactions. Each person therefore has their own reality that is considered correct. Relativism is the ontological perspective within the qualitative, or constructivist paradigm of research.

Constructivism
Constructivists believe that individuals or groups construct meaning or reality, based on interactions of the social environment. We do not find knowledge, we construct it. It is therefore possible to have multiple, socially constructed realities that are considered correct. Constructivists, reject the notion that an objective reality exists. The epistemology considers the researcher and participants as co-creators of the findings. It involves interaction between the researcher and participants. The methodologies used in constructivist research are therefore based on interactions between and among the researcher and participants. A consensus is sought within the findings. Qualitative methods like in-depth interviews are used and context is well-described.

Post-modernism
Between positivism and constructivism there are paradigms that combine variant degrees of both opposing perspectives. Post-modernism represents a range of viewpoints and is therefore impossible to define. Post-modernists believe that it is not possible to define social phenomenon, meaning that attempting to define it would be contrary to post-modernism itself. Instead it is a term that refers to a movement away from traditional schools of thought that is founded on a distrust of large or abstract theories that explain reality. Essentially, post-modernists do not believe in a truth that can be defined.

Post-positivism
Post-positivism is a paradigm that represents one of the earliest shifts away from positivism and shares a number of similarities with it. Post-positivism is founded on a critical realist ontology. Like realists, critical realists believe that a reality exists. However, they do not think that it can be perfectly detected, due to our ‘flaud’ ways of finding it as well as the nature of phenomena. Critical realists believe that claims of reality need to be critically examined in a variety of ways, in order to get the closest possible estimation of reality, but it will never be perfect. In post-positivism a theory cannot be proven, but a strong case can be made for it by disproving alternative explanations. The epistemology within post-positivism, like positivism, values objectivity. However, unlike positivism, post-positivists do not believe it is possible to maintain absolute distance from the researched. They recognize an attempt to control the potential influences that the researches background knowledge could have on observations. Findings are evaluated, based on pre-existing knowledge and critique. If they are replicated they are likely true, but they are always open to being proven wrong. The methodology in this post-positivistic paradigm, incorporates a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. They believe that knowledge exists in a social context that is understood best by using both quasi-experiments and interpretative research methods. However, quantitative methods are often favoured in post-positivism. Instead of proving hypotheses they are falsified. Experimental methods are modified to include quasi-experimental methods. More contextual information is collected the participant’s view is sought to determine meaning and contribute to grounded theory. This goal is accomplished using more qualitative methods.

**Critical realism**

Please note that while critical realism has been described as the ontology underpinning the post-positivist paradigm, some philosophies of critical realism can be said to be more distinct. One way of looking at critical realism is the combination of a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology. Critical realists believe that a reality exists, which does not depend on our perception of it.

**Critical theory**

Critical theory on the other hand is a paradigm that represents a further shift from positivism than post-positivism. It is founded on historical realism, which essentially proposed that what is seen as real has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. While these realities are inaccurately considered truth, they are essentially real now. The epistemology in this paradigm, is based on interactions of the researcher and the researched and subjectivity. The values of the researcher are considered an influence on the findings. The methodology is therefore based on dialogue that discovers findings through exchanging logical arguments.
Epilogue

I hope you found this video useful. For more in-depth view of these terms, please visit the link below and get the e-book. You may also find the links to other videos that may be helpful. Thank you!