

Assessing Your Research Personality

by

J. Bruce Francis, Ph.D. The Graduate School of America ©1996

It is a well-established and rationally defensible principle that the choice of research method depends on the nature of the research question and the availability of information. What is not so well-known are two other principles that guide the choice of research method, and make the process far less rational and far more human.

The first non-rational principle derives from institutional and department politics and is stated that the choice for any graduate student depends on the preference of the advisor or the department. In institutions where this principle operates strongly, graduate students choose a non-accepted method at their peril.

A second non-rational principle is based on human beliefs and values about knowledge, about how we take in information and how we process it. This principle, while not independent of social values, partakes more of basic personality structure. Stated quite generally, it is that the choice of research method depends on the personality style of the researcher. This idea was developed in detail by Mitroff and Kilman who developed a typology based on the work of Carl Jung. Jung had postulated that knowledge was based on two independent processes, the taking in of information and the sifting of that information to reach conclusions. People could be classified in terms of the two dimensions at the same time. People, argued Jung, differed from one another in that some used sensations as their preferred mode of generating information (S) while others generated information more intuitively (N). They also differ in how they process that information to reach conclusions. Some prefer to think, using logic and analysis (T), while others prefer to decide on the basis of feeling (F). These are the categories upon which the Myers-Briggs Inventory was developed. Mitroff and Kilman used the categories to postulate different research styles and to relate those styles to the kinds of research approaches that are available. Their analysis resulted in a dramatic opening of research possibilities and a clearer understanding of some of the fundamental epistemological differences which characterize those who choose one method over another.

For those graduate students trying to decide what research method to choose, in a context where they are given wider choice than often occurs in traditional graduate institutions, an understanding of their own research personality and their consequent preferred research style can be most beneficial. As Simon and Francis point out most of us have our own unique style of inquiry. Some styles embody the traditional norms of science while others exemplify non-traditional norms. There is no one right or wrong way to investigate a problem per se; but if you have a very strong research style, you might find it frustrating to work on a project that is designed for a different type of researcher (p. 18)

Complete the questionnaire which follows. Answer each question and record your answers in the spaces provided. Your score will indicate the type of research personality you have.

Instructions:

Read each statement and indicate how strongly you agree with each declaration.

A 5-point Likert scale where 1 is totally disagree and 5 is totally agree. Your values will be in the range from 1 to 5.

Statement #1

To truly understand the AIDS epidemic, one must ascertain the "Truth" about AIDS. A researcher must look at data, and make recommendations for further study based on these findings. Conclusions should not be based on subjective information or anecdotal stories that rely on personal feeling.

T 3 - It depends on what the research is trying to determine... not all data is quantitative for such a study; is the study looking at treatment or societal views

Statement #2

To truly understand the AIDS epidemic, one must look deeply and with feeling at the individuals who are afflicted with the disease. Recommendations should be based on the immediate needs of those individuals and on a sensitive analysis of their experience.

F 5 - If the goal of the study is to determine quality of life or public perception, qualitative data regarding how a person feels or is perceived would be important

Statement #3

To truly deal with the AIDS epidemic, one must examine the methods we have currently available and determine the most practical solution to the problems, with little regard for a "vague" plan in the unspecified future.

S 4 - Before you can make any plans for the future you need to fully understand what methods are currently available, as well as their limitations

Statement #4

To truly deal with the AIDS epidemic, one should examine all possibilities and relationships that exist and that could exist, and take a broad long-range view of the problem. A quick fix is to be avoided.

I 4 - Depends on how you approach the problem, you can have rapid, failure driven development or broad theoretical research to develop a single method; either one works

To discover your research style, put the answers to the to the numbered items in the spaces provided.

Fill in the sums:

T + I = 7 (CT) F + I = 9 (CH) T + S = 7 (AS) F + S = 9 (PH)

Your research style is the highest number from these sums. You will find the definitions according to Mitroff and Kilman on page 3 of this document. Are you a Conceptual Theorist, and Analytical Scientist, a Conceptual Humanist, or a Particular Humanist?

My scores are indifferent or agree with most statements bc I recognize them as valid research methods. Would I personally choose those topics methods, not likely. I know from previous projects that I'm closer to an Analytical Scientist.

The scores of the test say that I'm either Conceptual Humanist or Particular Humanist

Four research style is the highest sum combination.

Here's the meaning of each style, couched in terms of the Mitroff and Kilman typology. The type of study most favored by each type is described in relation to the topic of 'cigarette smoking and cancer.'

CT - Conceptual Theorist - this type of researcher is holistic and imaginative, combining (I) an intuitive means of generating information with (T), the use of logic and analysis to reach conclusions. Conceptual Theorists believe in a value-free science which seeks multiple causation for complex reality and uses multivariate correlational techniques to develop grand theory. The goal of the CT researcher is to find a theory of the multiple factors which correlate cigarette smoking and cancer.

AS - Analytic Scientist - this type of researcher prefers exactness, precision, and unambiguous situations. The AS type combines (S) the preference for taking in information through observation with (T) the use of logic and analysis to reach conclusions. The ideal form of research for the Analytic Scientist is the experiment, preferably one in which all variables are controlled. An AT would ask "Does cigarette smoking cause cancer?" and would not accept research results which asked the question in an ambiguous way.

CH - Conceptual Humanist - This type of researcher combines (N) an intuitive means of generating information with (F) the use of feelings and values to arrive at conclusions about that information. Knowledge exists to better humanity and the Conceptual Humanist seeks to develop and use knowledge to address major social problems. The prototype research forms for the CT are policy research and action research studies. For a CH, the evidence for the relation between cigarette smoking and cancer has already been found and research is now needed about how to stop people from smoking cigarettes. This is anything but a value-free point of view.

PH - Particular Humanist - This type of researcher combines (S) generating information through observation with (F) reaching conclusions based on values. Research is not value free but involves detailed and sensitive descriptions of individual experience by a researcher who is passionately involved with the subject. A prototypical research project for the PH is a phenomenological analysis of a single individual's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. A research following the PH style might be drawn to such a study as "The Diary of a Cancer Patient." adapted from Simon, M. and Francis, J.B. *The Dissertation Cookbook*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt, 1991. Mitroff, I and Kilman, R. *Methodological Approaches to Social Science*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978