Paradigms Exposed
Activity 1 Handout

Directions

For each set of statements, put a check by the one that comes closest to what you believe. In cases where you feel torn, pick the one that comes closest (see example below). There are no right or wrong answers.

EXAMPLE - DO THIS!			EXAMPLE - DO NOT DO THIS!		
_____	1a.	My favorite food is pizza.	___X___	1a.	My favorite food is pizza.
___X___	1b.	My favorite food is pasta.	_____	1b.	My favorite food is pasta.
_____	1c.	My favorite food is pancakes.	___X___	1c.	My favorite food is pancakes.
_____	1d.	My favorite food is pears.	_____	1d.	My favorite food is pears.

_____ 1a.   There exists a single reality independent of any person.
_____ 1b.   There exist multiple realities that are constructed by people.
_____ 1c.   There is a single reality, and all individuals have their own unique interpretation of reality.
_____ 1d.   There exist multifaceted realities which are socially and historically located within a complex cultural context.

_____ 2a.   Reality(ies) is governed by immutable natural laws.
_____ 2b.   Reality(ies) is not governed by natural laws.
_____ 2c.   Reality(ies) are contextually relative.
_____ 2d.   Reality(ies) are governed by systemic power structures.

_____ 3a.   An observer in an organization can remain detached from what she or he is observing.
_____ 3b.   An observer in an organization becomes part of that which is being observed.
_____ 3c.   An observer in an organization can remain detached from what she or he is observing; however, choice about what is observed, how, and for what purpose is based on what he or she values.
_____ 3d.   An observer in an organization is neither completely detached or attached. Rather, through a trusting and culturally respectful relationship, they seek to co-interrogate the notion of privilege.

_____ 4a.   A process can be investigated effectively without concern for the specific context.
_____ 4b.   The context of a program is needed to understand what is occurring in it.
_____ 4c.   There are some elements to what is occurring that are context-dependent, and other elements that are context-independent.
_____ 4d.   The context of a program, especially issues of power, is needed to understand what is occurring in it.

_____ 5a. Evaluation should be able to determine the true relationship between two variables or factors.
_____ 5b. Evaluation provides tentative conclusions that are always open to interpretation and modification.
_____ 5c. Some evaluation conclusions are tentative, while others are enduring.
_____ 5d. Evaluation should further social justice and human rights.

_____ 6a. The truth about any relationship between two variables can be determined by testing it empirically.
_____ 6b. The truth about any relationship between two variables can be determined by judgments of knowledgeable experts without further tests.
_____ 6c. The truth about any relationship between two variables can be determined through what the evaluator deems is appropriate given a particular question posed at a particular time using a particular set of data/evidence.
_____ 6d. The truth about any relationship cannot be separated from power structures.

_____ 7a. Facts and values are independent.
_____ 7b. Facts have no meaning except in some value context.
_____ 7c. Facts and values are co-dependent.
_____ 7d. Facts and values are co-dependent and influenced by one's social position.

_____ 8a. Every action or outcome has a primary cause that will be identified at some future time.
_____ 8b. Every action is "caused" by an infinite array of considerations that may never be known.
_____ 8c. Every action or outcome has a primary cause, but whether it will be identified at some future time is uncertain.
_____ 8d. Every action is "caused" by social and historical factors.

_____ 9a. The value of evaluation is to predict and control behavior.
_____ 9b. The value of evaluation is to increase understanding.
_____ 9c. The value of evaluation is how it is used and the results of that use.
_____ 9d. The value of evaluation is to give a voice to marginalized groups.

_____ 10a. Solutions to organizational problems in one organization should be applicable to other organizations.
_____ 10b. Solutions to organizational problems are unique unto themselves.
_____ 10c. Some solutions to organizational problems are applicable, while other solutions are unique to a particular context.
_____ 10d. Solutions to organizational problems are grounded in truth, reconciliation, and reparations.

_____ 11a. Change is a rational linear process that will occur naturally regardless of the specific people involved.
_____ 11b. Meaningful organizational change is nonlinear and dependent on the active involvement of those affected by the change.

_____ 11c.   Change is a combination of rational linear processes, as well as nonlinear processes dependent on who is involved and how.

_____ 11d.   Change is a combination of public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledges and redresses past harms.

_____ 12a.   Change occurs only when something unusual causes it. Nonchange, or status quo, is the normal state of organizations.

_____ 12b.   Change is the normal condition of life.

_____ 12c.   For some things, change is a normal condition. For other things, nonchange, or status quo, is the normal state.

_____ 12d.   Nonchange, or status quo, is the normal state of things because those in power want to keep their power. However, change is possible through political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, and resources.

_____ 13a.   Systematic collection of objective data about knowledge, behaviors, and physical conditions provides the most meaningful knowledge about learning.

_____ 13b.   Obtaining feelings, thoughts, and meanings of actions through interviews provides the most meaningful knowledge about learning.

_____ 13c.   Each type of data collection technique only allows you to see a small piece of the entire picture. You get a meaningful picture by using multiple techniques.

_____ 13d.   Obtaining data that respects cultural norms and promotes human rights and social justice is most meaningful.

_____ 14a.   Quantitative data analyzed with tests of significance are a necessary part of a valuable evaluation study.

_____ 14b.   The more nearly a study reflects the complexity of learning using "thick description," the more valuable it is.

_____ 14c.   Studies that are the most valuable are those that collect quantitative and qualitative data.

_____ 14d.   Studies that are the most valuable are those that honor indigenous and cultural ways of knowing.

_____ 15a.   If a study cannot be replicated, and the results verified, I would not have confidence in the study.

_____ 15b.   A 6-month case study of an organization carried out by a team of evaluators would provide valuable information even if it could not be replicated and results could not be verified.

_____ 15c.   I would have confidence in a year-long mixed method study that provided an overview of the average effect of a program, with thick description of the experiences of participants who responded better than average and worse than average.

_____ 15d.   I would not have confidence in a study of a program for First Nations peoples if Elders were not an integral part of the process.

Total A's: _____   Total B's: _____   Total C's: _____   Total D's: _____

Interpreting Your Responses

If you had the most **A responses**,

you lean towards the **Post-Positivist Paradigm**

Post-positivists hold the belief that one true reality exists, and it is independent of the observer. The observer's distance from their object of study allows them to reduce bias in their research. Post-positivists tend to favor experimental or quasi-experimental designs and quantitative methods. Post-positivists believe that good research – as characterized by intellectual honesty and suppression of personal bias – is important for the benefit of society.

Evaluation approaches that take a post-positive lens include theory-driven evaluation, randomized control trials, and the Kirkpatrick model.

If you had the most **B responses**,

you lean towards the **Constructivist Paradigm**

Constructivists hold the belief that there are multiple socially constructed realities. This relativist view of reality assumes that individuals construct their own reality based on experiences and social interactions. Because of these multiple realities, a researcher cannot discover a universal truth, instead, they must understand and interpret all data within contextual environments. Constructivists believe that values are inseparable from researchers. A researcher's values influence the topic they choose to study, the questions they choose to ask, and their decisions about who to include, how to collect data, and how to interpret the findings. Constructivists tend to favor qualitative methods that allow them to immerse themselves and their readers in the everyday experiences of their participants.

Evaluation approaches that take a constructivist lens include responsive evaluation, case study approaches, and collaborative evaluation.

If you had the most **C responses**,

you lean towards the **Pragmatist Paradigm**

Pragmatists avoid spending a lot of time talking about the nature of "truth" and "reality"; instead, they prefer to focus on whether the solutions to a problem "work." Rather than claiming they will discover the truth, they focus on the practical implications of information and learning. Unlike post-positivists, pragmatists do not worry about an observer's distance from their object of study, but the appropriateness of the relationship is judged by how well that relationship allows you to achieve your purpose in the evaluation. Pragmatists tend to favor mixed methods. They believe the choice of methods should match the purpose of the study.

Evaluation approaches that take a pragmatist lens include utilization-focused evaluation, developmental evaluation, and empowerment evaluation.

If you had the most **D responses**,

you lean towards the **Transformatist Paradigm**

Transformatists hold the belief that there are multiple realities that are directly influenced by power and privilege. Transformatists focus on the viewpoints of marginalized groups and interrogating systemic power structures. They believe knowledge is socially and historically situated, and nothing can be understood

without understanding the underlying issues of power. Transformatists hold that all evaluation efforts should be to actively further social justice and human rights. All elements of an evaluation should take into account cultural norms, recognize the inextricable values and bias of the evaluator, and protect the dignity of participants.

Evaluation approaches that take a transformatist lens include culturally responsive evaluation, feminist evaluation, and indigenous evaluation.

Additional Resources:

To learn more about paradigms in evaluation, see the following books.

Thomas, V. & Campbell, P. (2021). *Evaluation in today's world: Respecting diversity, improving quality, and promoting usability.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Mertens, D., & Wilson, A. (2019). *Program evaluation theory and practice: A comprehensive guide*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Credit

This *Paradigms Exposed* activity was adapted from Preskill, H., & Russ-Eft, D. (2015). *Building evaluation capacity: Activities for teaching and training.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage. By Bianca Montrosse-Moorhead, Daniela Schroeter, and Lyssa Wilson Becho.