RESEARCH DESIGN FOR STUDING PROJECT PARTNERING RESPONDS TO CURRENT ISSUES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Growing interest has been shown in the application of partnering in the construction industry in recent years. The shift in structural, behavioral & cultural norms leading to mutual trust and understanding is essential to every successful partnering effort. According to literature, effective organizational structure has the power to mould and reflect cultural and behavioral traits. In order to address the intricate linkages between behavior and culture in large-scale partnering initiatives, this article provide guidance how to investigates influence of effectiveness of organizational structure and it's administration. For this to happen, complicated human conduct must be comprehended, interpreted, explained, and mapped. Consequently, it is critical to understand and apply an effective research approach in order to meticulously gather pertinent data. This study argues that the positivism perspective is appropriate ways to tackle the behavioral and cultural issues of complex interactions in construction partnering. In order to defend the choice of an acceptable research philosophy and research technique, the layered approach is employed, stressing the key aspects of the arguments.

Keywords: Partnering, Organizational Structure, Organizational Culture, Research Philosophy, Research Approach, Research Method.

1. INTRODUCTION

The creation and validation of the several types of knowledge connected to project management practices such as "Partnering" are at the core of project management research. A variety of essential procedures, including observation, contemplation, theory conjecturing, and testing of theories and models designed to capture the core of partnering realities, are used in the methods to project management research and knowledge development. As such, it would be imprudent to do research without taking into consideration the underlying philosophical problems.

To fully take use of the possibilities and resources at hand, research has to be planned methodically. With a view to addressing the structural, behavioral and cultural obstacles connected to partnering organizations/ projects in the construction industry, this article aims to describe existing research approaches and philosophies while rationally defending the application of suitable research methodology. In order to do this, the hierarchical research methodology model developed by Kagioglou et al. (1998) is proposed, which is consistent with the **competing values framework (cameron & quinn, 1999)** and highlights the key points of the arguments used to support the choice of an acceptable research strategy, methodology, and philosophical attitude (K.L Bash, M.C.H Smith, 2021).

2. BACKGROUND

With production placed in the top ten worldwide construction sectors, the UK has one of the strongest construction industries in the world (Latham and Egan, 1998; Mohanaraj et al., 2021). Regarded as a cornerstone of the home economy, its capacity to complete the most challenging and inventive projects is unmatched by any other building sector globally (Egan, 1998). However, the industry's overall underperformance is a major source of worry (K. Dorosh, 2019). ***Constructional professionals are aware of the issues it faces due to deteriorated partnering enabling factors adopted, including low and unstable demand and revenue, a fragmented industrial structure, a lack of innovation and research, insufficient investment in training, lack of using tools, lower level trust commitments communication & policies, and its present procurement strategy***. In order to innovate and enhance performance, these issues must be resolved in the industry (Latham, 1994; Egan, Challender et al., 2019; Perera. P. N. R. et al., 2022).

The construction industry has launched support divisions and initiatives to improve performance to international standards, following industry reports. A focus on achieving construction excellence has led to extensive research. Building excellence and business excellence models share fundamental goals, and a comparison between construction sector concepts and globally known models was conducted to identify similarities and differences in implementing excellence principles. The **importance of organizational structural elements and partnering enablers in excellence notions demonstrate by the results.**

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Richard Haigh (2005), Ingirige (2004), Wood and Ellis (2005), and other industry-commissioned papers have identified an increasing curiosity in the use of excellence & innovative ideas, as well as the usage of partnering in construction. In an effort to address the separation and absence of integration that have plagued efforts to enhance project performance over time, partnering and similar types of collaboration were initially viewed as a solution. According to Larson and Drexler (1997) and Wood and Ellis (2005), this is arguably the biggest advancement in project performance enhancement to date. It also directly helps the whole supply chain. Numerous analysts contend that collaboration can yield significant benefits for project performance, including increased innovation and enhanced user satisfaction, in addition to meeting time, cost, and quality targets (Latham, 1994; Bennett & Jayes, 1998; Bresnen & Marshall, 2000c).

As per Bresnen and Marshall, (2000a) and Wood and Ellis, (2005), partnering is characterized as a sustained dedication among two or more entities aimed at accomplishing certain business goals through the optimization of each party's resources. Though opinions on its specifics differ, there is general consensus over the partnering principle. This covers a vast range of ideas that represent beliefs, practices, attitudes, behaviors, tools, and procedures.

Few studies have looked into the social and psychological factors that are connected to the effective integration of partnering, despite the fact that observers emphasize the significance of altering attitudes, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and changing organizational cultures. Better, **more suitable organizational structure and administration** is required for the duration of the project to manage and guide such a complicated supply chain achieving its goal and mutual advantages.

In order to accomplish particular business objectives by optimizing the efficacy of each participant's resources and forming long-term business connections, construction partnering projects require empirical proof, which suggests the importance of **organizational structure and its' administration operations** in the research.
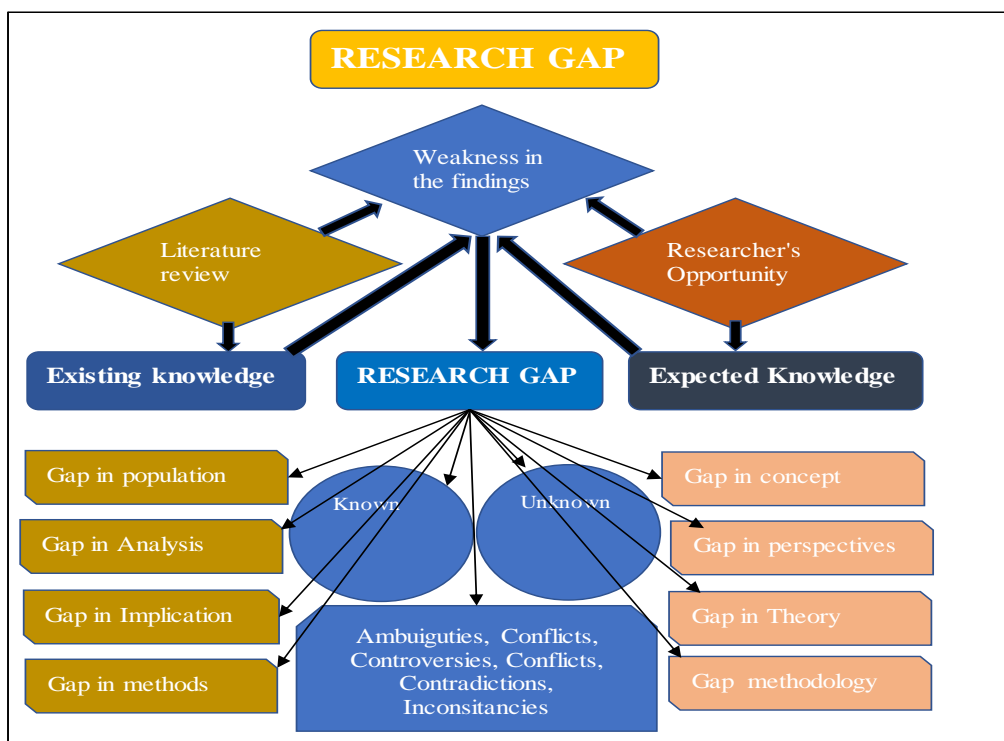

Figure 1: Types of research gaps (Drawn by Author).

4. RESEARCH FOCUS

The transformation of attitudes and behaviors leading to mutual trust and understanding is essential to any successful partnership arrangement. Many literatures assume that cultural congruence is a necessary condition for collaboration. Cultural change is an important aspect of partnership, as it involves altering attitudes and practices.

The significance of decentralized, adaptable structures is emphasized by Bresnen and Marshall, (2000a), who state that formal partnering arrangements must be transformed into actual behavioral differences at the operational level by the team acting with a great deal of autonomy and discretion.

Enabling factors, culture and structure of organizations are obviously needed in construction partnering projects given the importance of behavioral and cultural obstacles on partnering-related collaboration approaches and the paucity of empirical data in the literature in the field. Selecting partnering projects is also justified by the recent increase in the partnering projects' share of the construction output. For instance, as per gov statistics, the amount and significance of UK partnering projects is demonstrated by the public sector's total expenditure on PFI projects are six times higher than the partnering. Large-scale partnering projects, however, will be chosen for the purposes of this study because of their importance in terms of their contribution to the overall production of the construction sector. Large-scale collaboration initiatives can also take several years to complete and include a variety of stakeholders throughout the whole supply chain. As a result, an organization with a short-term focus and shared advantages becomes the goal. Research will concentrate on managing these kinds of partnering agreements in order to comprehend and deal with the intricate nature of behavioral and cultural difficulties.

There are restrictions on the application of contract rewards as a tool for motivation in partnering projects, and that more powerful behavioral impacts were frequently found in wider organizational objectives. Hence, it is important to foster collaboration through the implementation of a diverse array of supplementary internal policies, procedures, and practices, rather than just depending on the development of suitable incentive mechanisms (Bresnen and Marshall 2000c). Accordingly, the organizational structure and its administrative operations may be used to create supportive corporate policies, processes, and practices to overcome the difficulties brought on by behavioral and cultural diversity in partnering projects, as was covered in research issues. Furthermore, despite being at the core of many recommendations for enhancing industry collaboration, the intricate relationship among individual or group behavior, structure and organizational culture is not sufficiently addressed in the literature. Bennett and Jayes (1998) noted that this relationship is particularly complex. In large-scale collaborative initiatives, organizational structure and its admin operations is investigated as a means of addressing intricate links between behavior and culture.

5. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To handle the **behavioral and cultural issues (organizational & human)** that arise from construction partnering, the study seeks **to determine philosophies and approaches for best suitable organizational structure and partnering enabling factors**.

This procedure will involve a thorough review of the literature to **comprehend the roles of organizational structure and partnering enablers on the cultural and behavioral issues and the difficulties involved with partnering ventures**.

Making decisions on what information to gather and how to analyze it will be made easier by this "theory development" towards partnering enablers and suit structure in tackling the behavioral and cultural problems of partnering initiatives.

With the aim of improving performance via the resolution of behavioral and cultural problems associated with building partnering projects, the following objectives are designed to provide a framework for successful partnering based on culture and structures, crucial and success partnering supporting variables.

a) Determine the behavioral and cultural obstacles that construction partnering face.

b) Examine the variety of partnering enablers, organizational structures, cultures and professionals involve in current building partnering projects.

c) Recognize and assess culture and structure of organizations and types of human factors to deal with the societal and behavioral issues that arise in building partnering projects.

d) Create a suitable partnering framework in order to centralized, standardize, encourage and enhance project performance for construction partnering.

e) Priorities the partnering enablers towards drawing more attention for the deteriorated enablers so that necessary improvements can be made prior to the building partnering projects.

f) To determine if these culture profiles are useful in promoting fruitful partnerships, this study assesses the organizational culture dimensions in Sri Lanka and identifies the kind of culture of each dimension.

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMWORK

In accordance with the significant variables found on the topic during the literature review, a conceptual framework has been built as sumrised in the Figure.2, below.

The conceptual framework in the figure.1 above was based on the synthesis and review of the literature. The study intends to achieve its objectives through theory construction and analysis using cultural and behavioral barriers in partnering, partnering enabling factors in practice, organizational culture & structure in terms of strategic partnering and cultural dimensions, and the relevant literature synthesis etc.

Accordingly, the research questions and their hypotheses are arranged and included in the section below. Findings of research gaps in the LR is important to setup the research design and questions.
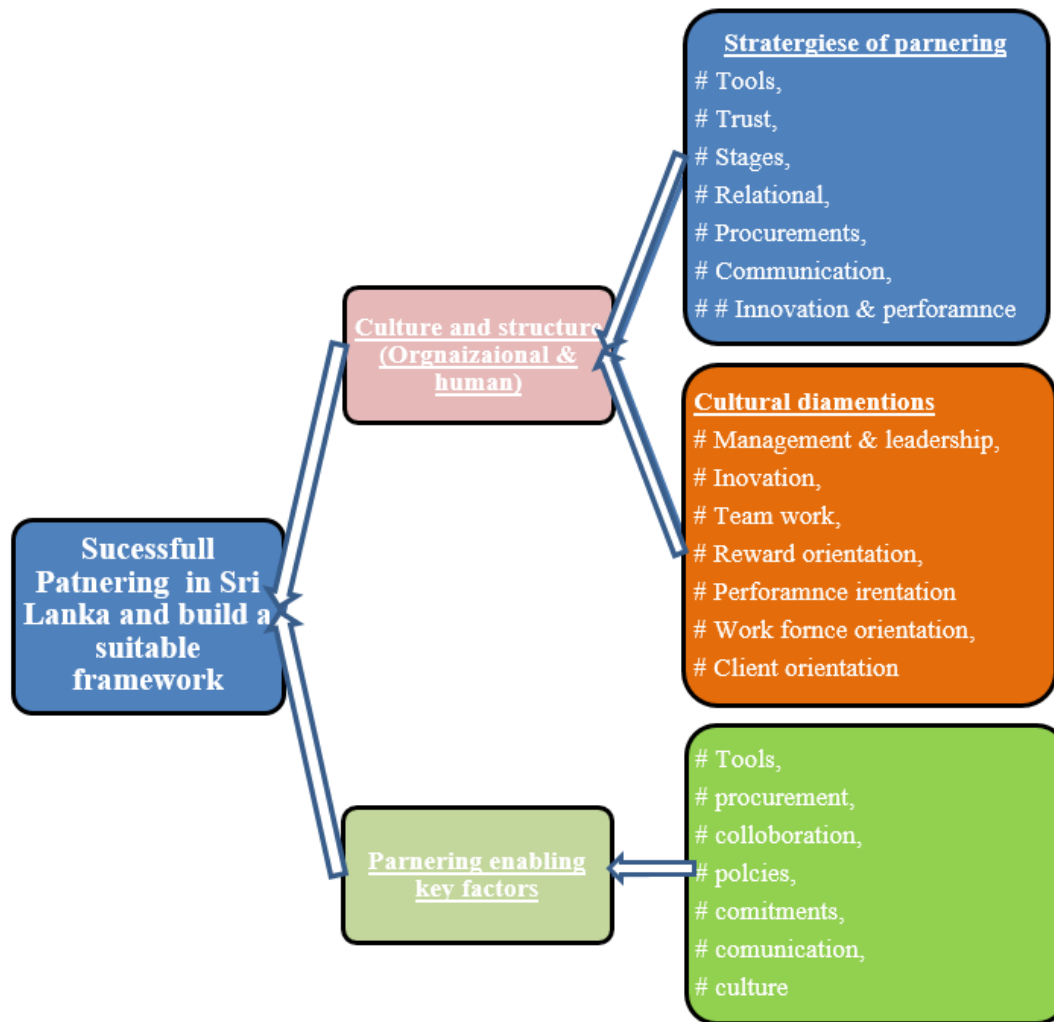
Figure 2: Research conceptual framework (Drawn by Author)

6.2 Research Questions

In a phenomenological investigation, the best way to define research propositions is to use research questions rather than research hypotheses. The **exploratory** character of this research further justifies the choice of research topics for this study. In order to achieve the aforementioned goals and objectives, the following fundamental research questions are developed based on the observed theoretical gaps. Data has been gathered by organizing the questions in a qualitative and quantitative manner. According to N. Mathers (2019), B. Marr (2019), Semi-structured interviews (open ended) with a calculated sample (20 Nos) based on the saturation threshold were used to obtain qualitative data. As per Pahwa (2023) and M. Sadgir (2019), a questionnaire was distributed among a computed nonrandom sample covering whole construction industry of Sri Lanka (200 Nos) for quantitative data collection. Both the semis structured

questions (**17 Nos question**s) and questionnaire (**45 Nos questions**), each of which has "sub questions" that are further explained in the section on "research methodology".

Both types of questions were principally based on 4-5 themes and aimed to study about the significant variables via collecting data through the context of following questions;

6.2.1 Semi structured Interview questions for the content analysis;

a) Section 2; The first theme investigates how understanding the partnering idea (four interview questions);

b) Section 3; the second theme investigate the awareness of international partnering methods (five interview questions).

c) Section 4; the third theme investigates about SLCI's organizational structure and culture (five interview questions).

d) Section 5; the forth theme investigates the importance of organizational culture in partnering (two interview questions);

The fifth theme investigates how participants rank the important enabling criteria for partnership (1 interview question).

6.2.2 Questions for the Questionnaire

The purpose of the study's questionnaires is to let the researcher collect broad input on the use of partnering and the sorts of organizational cultures that exist in Sri Lankan construction companies from industry experts. Five sections make up the questionnaire and all are multiple choice questions;

a) Section (I): Participant profile (8 questions).

b) Section (II): Understanding the idea of partnering (theme 1); (19 questions).

c) Section (III): Three questions: awareness of international partnering techniques (theme 2).

d) Section (IV): Ten questions about organizational culture and structure in the SLCI (Theme 3).

e) Section (V): The importance of organizational culture in partnership (Theme 4); (four questions).

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Collis and Hussey (2003), research methodology encompasses the entire process of designing, from the theoretical foundations to the data collecting and analysis. This model was chosen due to its meta-level coherence and guidance, as well as the range of interactive tools and techniques it provides the researcher with (Kagioglou et al. 2000) as show in the figure.3, below. The researcher may investigate each layer in detail thanks to the layered approach, which provides a simple yet methodical structure for the research process. The decisions taken for the subsequent inner levels are guided by the

explanations provided in the outer layers.

Figure 3: Nested model on research methodology (Kagioglou et al, 2000)

7.2 Research Philosophy

A researcher's presumptions when conducting an inquiry are the main focus of the research philosophy. The two primary schools of philosophy, social constructionism or phenomenology and positivism, may be distinguished, despite significant blurring (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al, 2003). According to positivists, the world is external and should be assessed using objective means. On the other hand, social constructionists maintain that reality is socially produced and given meaning by individuals (Easterby-Smith et al, 2003). Table. 1 presents the opposing perspectives of social constructionism and positivism.

Table 1: Difference of Positivism and Social Constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al, 2003)

	Positivism	Social Constructionism
The observer	Shall be independent	is included in the observational data.
Explanations	Needs to prove the relationship is causal	Seek to broaden people's comprehension of the circumstances
Human Interest	Shall be irrelevant	are the primary forces behind the science
Sampling requires	large numbers chosen at random.	A small number of examples selected for certain purposes
Using generalizations	Statistical-probability	Theoretical-abstraction
Concepts	Must be put into practice in order to be quantified	Stakeholder viewpoints have to be included
Research progress	Hypotheses & deduction	collecting rich data that inspires thoughts
Units of analysis	Must be stated in the most basic language possible	maybe including the intricacy of the "whole" scenario
Methods used	Experiments, Simulation, **Surveys**, Modelling	Ethnography, Case study, Action research

The research's goals, as stated in the aims and objectives, are to betterment and comprehend organizational culture, structure and key enabling factors practices better in order to solve the barriers in partnering and behavioral and cultural issues on it. With an emphasis on in-depth research in an uncontrolled setting, this is primarily an attempt to develop a theory using inductive method of data collection. **Studying the intricate relationships that exist between teams, procedures, leaders, and followers in real-world settings is another aspect of study**. Research on the subjective elements of human behavior follows, with an emphasis on the interpretation of organizational culture and structure as opposed to its quantification, as well as the phenomena of partnering enabling variables.

According to Creswell, (1994) and Collis & Hussey, (2003), Philosophical reasoning is centered on epistemological, ontological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological presumptions. The philosophical attitude of a research is positioned by epistemological, ontological and axiological hypotheses, and the language and research process are addressed by rhetorical and methodological hypotheses, respectively. It is crucial to establish the epistemological, ontological and axiological hypotheses at this point before starting the research design in order to place the study on the philosophical spectrum.

According to Katie Moon and Deborah Blackman (2017), ontology, the study of being, is concerned with the reality of the world that is knowable to humans. According to Collis and Hussey (2003) as shown in the figure below, the ontological positioning method involves the researcher determining whether reality is socially created and can only be understood by looking at how human actors see it, or if the reality was objective and exists outside of them. Realist and idealist/relativism are the names given to both of those ontological presumptions (Gummesson, 1991; Johnson and Duberly, 2000).
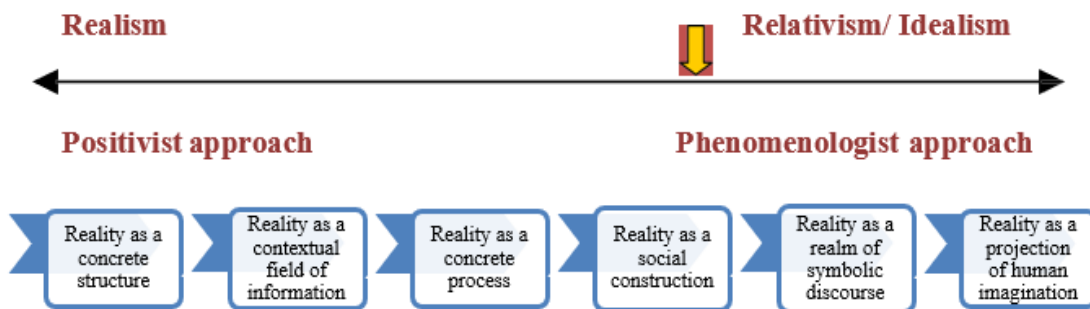

Figure 4: Ontological assumptions Source: Morgan and Smircich (1980) and, Collis & Hussey, (2003), (Drawn by Author)

The literature analysis unequivocally shows the existence of cultural concerns and partnering practices, which are meanings and relationships maintained via contact and action among people. The extreme actuality of the phenomenologist method is not that much supported by research, nevertheless. In Figure 4, a vertical block arrow therefore indicates the ontological stance of the study.

The issues of how and what may be known are addressed by epistemological orientation (Paul main, 2023). On one extreme of the epistemological spectrum, positivists hold that reality exists outside of the observer and that the researcher's only role is to discover this prior reality. On the other hand, constructionist study does not presume any existing reality, and its objectives are to comprehend how individuals create structures to make sense of their surroundings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2003). The research approach that will be employed to accomplish the study's goals will also be reflected in the epistemological stance that has been selected within its particular context.

According to John Dudovskiy (2023) and Sexton (2007), there is a distinction between value judgements that are based on values that are biassed and value-laden and those that are unbiased and value-free. These axiological assumptions seem to be related to the nature of values. The scientific method and science itself, according to positivists, have no intrinsic worth. Social constructionists, on the other hand, take the opposite stance, believing that researchers have values that influence the interpretations that are made of their findings and the things that are accepted as true (Collis & Hussey, 2003). A method based on positivism is more appropriate since the research being done is interpretive and values-laden. Also, it appears that the axiological presumptions concern the nature of value and the basis for value judgements, which may be classified as either value-free and objective or value-laden and biased (John Dudovskiy, 2023; Sexton, 2007).

The philosophical orientation of the research is depicted in Figure.5 by P. Chipangura et al. (2016) and Sutrisna (2009), who examined the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of the study. For ontological assumptions, it adopts an idealist perspective; nevertheless, in value-laden axiological positions, it adopts a social constructionist posture in epistemological endeavors. This philosophical perspective informs the choice of the best research strategy, as shown by the layered approach and detailed in the next section.

7.3 Research Approach

The goal of research methodologies is to structure research activities and data collection methods in a way that maximizes the likelihood of achieving the study objectives. They are motivated by the right research procedures and guided by philosophical foundations. As per Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), the fundamental contrast between positivist and social constructionist techniques is intimately linked to five of the six essential criteria for selecting a suitable research strategy. Therefore, research techniques that are guided by research philosophies are filled in using Figure 5.

According to the choice made by philosophical setting up, this research adopts survey (positivism) stance. Because experimentation and case study methodologies are inconsistent with this research because it mostly belongs in social constructivism domain. According to the ontological premise of a robust "pre-existing reality," scientific investigations necessitate a high degree of environmental control, allowing the researcher to precisely, systematically, and immediately alter reality (Yin, 2003). A pure experimental

design is unable to control behavior in a real-world setting; this is only possible in laboratory settings. **On the other hand, survey does not need a great degree of environmental control. Exploratory questions of the "what" kind are simply enumerated in a survey**, and social science research may make easy use of them. The primary drawback of survey technique is that it is difficult to interpret an observed pattern and does not provide a sufficient response to a "why" inquiry (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This study necessitates a thorough examination of partnering enabling factors, organizational structure and culture domains, utilizing a combination of "what" and "why" inquiries to solve behavioral and cultural difficulties.
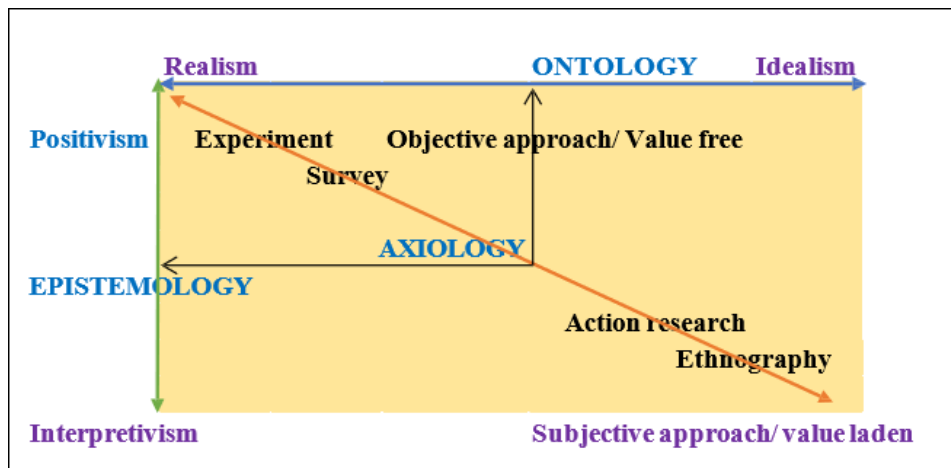

Figure 5: Philosophical positionings in research (Sexton, 2004). Drawn by Author

Among the remaining viable research methodologies are action research, case studies and ethnographic tactics; of these, **survey has been determined to be the most appropriate for this study**. By actively participating in the problem setting, the researcher attempts to address the issue and alter the participants' current state of affairs through action research (Waser and Johns, 2003). This participatory, partially controlled method, concerned with the method of enquiry to construct a process of planning, acting, reflecting and observing (Heller, 2004). Action research cannot be used as the best study methodology in circumstances like partially controlled, participatory observation, and intervention. Similar to this, ethnography is described as the study of individuals in fields in order to observe the social meaning, with the researcher taking part directly in the environment, if they are not also in the activities to gather data in an organized way (Brewer, 2004). While ethnography does not function in fully controlled situations, it nonetheless necessitates a high level of participant observation on the side of the researcher. On the other hand, a case study is an empirical investigation of a current occurrence in a real-world setting, particularly when it is difficult to distinguish the boundaries among the phenomenon and its environment (Yin, 2003). Even, if It addresses both "what" and "why" kinds of exploration and explanatory questions, still, it is somewhat challenging to identify a good or relevant Case project for the research within the target sample because partnering is a novel idea in the Sri Lankan business sector.

Figure.6 below, created by R. Elmansy (2016), provides a graphic explanation of the distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning;
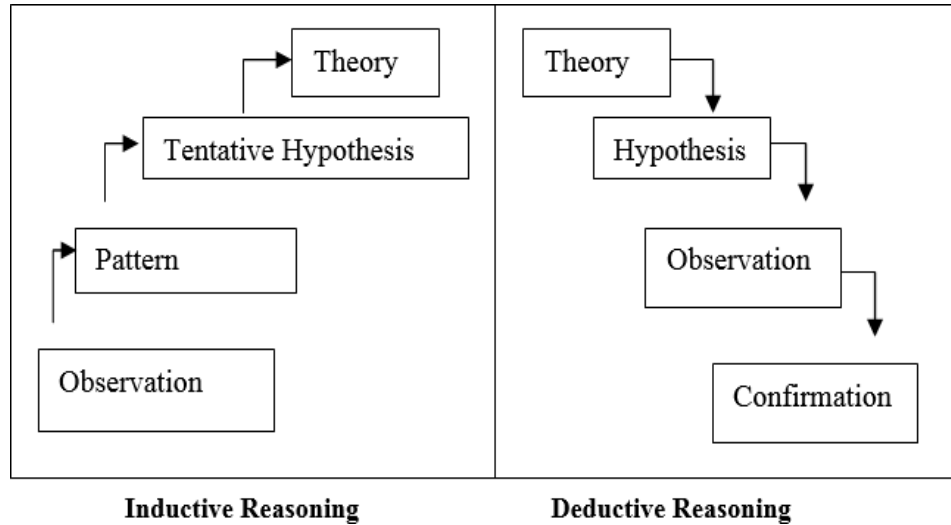

Figure 6: Distinction among inductive and deductive reasoning (R. Elmansy, 2016)

Furthermore, both the "inductive reasoning" and "deductive reasoning" approach has been chosen and applied in different stages of this study in accordance with the nature of the research design as previously described and as shown in the table 2, below;

Table 2: principle philosophical differences in research in between the techniques of quantitative & qualitative (Bryman, 2008, P.22)

SN	Description	Quantitative	Qualitative
1	Principle orientation on the role of theory for research	**Deductive; top-down**. may be theory testing.	**Inductive;** generation of theory and **Bottom up**.
2	Ontological orientation	**Objectivism**	**Constructivism**
3	Epistemological orientation	Natural science model in **positivism**	**Interpretivism**

7.4 Research Techniques

Research techniques include both data collection and data analysis, which belongs to the inner ring of nested research methodology. Since, this is a mixed method study, there are two types of data collection such as qualitative and quantitative methods as shown in the table 3. below;

Table 3: data collection and data analysis characteristics vs Qualitative and quantitative techniques

Characteristic	Qualitative	Quantitative
Sample size	Small; Typically, **20**, based on saturation **(20 used).**	Large; using standard formulas; typically, 100 – **200. (200 done).**
Method of data collection	**# Interviews (Nonrandom, semi structured),** # Observational study, # Focus group.	**# Surveys (Questionnaires)** # Online - web captures
Type of data	# pattern of Behavior, # Natural language.	Numeric.
Data analysis	Comprehend the data pattern / frequency of participants behavior and replies. i.e. using of **MAXQDA/ Nvivo20** etc.	Using numerical methods and statically analysis. i.e. Using of **SPSS27/29**, the testing of data and analysis of variables including non-parametric tests.
Data visualization	Quotes, frequencies and tabular formats of the content analysis.	Tables, graphs and charts with their relationships, tests result and determinations.

7.4.1 Data Collection

The intended methods of gathering data show how to properly address the research questions as outlined in the previous section in order to achieve the "aims and objectives" of this study. The semi-structured interviews, which included 17 open-ended questions, yielded qualitative data from interviews with 20 individuals who were chosen based on the study's objectives and goals.

Only 185 out of 200 participants in the quantitative data collection process actually answered the questionnaires that were sent to them via various channels, including emails, postal mail, and in-person hard copy pickup. In order to examine the participants' status for the same, as previously indicated, all were based on five themes (based on the categories contained in the conceptual framework above).

Each participant's organizational, human, cultural, and structural obstacles have been gathered in this context along with the underlying reasons of the difficulties and the partnership strategies that go along with them. "Survey technique" is regarded as the primary source of field survey information in data collection for the aforementioned aims. A survey protocol approach is employed to obtain pertinent rich data for analysis in order to aid this procedure.

To optimize the advantages of the evidence, Yin (2003) suggests three additional data collecting principles. These are the establishment of a survey database, the upkeep of a series of evidence, and the use of different sources of evidence.

Regarding reliability design testing and construct validity these ideas will be applied. Correctly implementing operational measurements is a matter of construct validity. Additionally, the unique attention given to the validity, reliability, and normalcy issues in the questionnaire, interviews, and tests is taken into account.

7.4.2 Data Analysis

To address the original hypotheses of a research, data analysis involves looking at, classifying, tabulating, testing, or reassembling both quantitative and qualitative information (Yin, 2003). In this study, depending on theoretical propositions is preferable to building theme descriptions and frameworks based on competing explanations in order to describe the overall analytic technique. The explanation building analytical approach is more suited for this research because of its explanatory character. However, the use of survey methodology, survey database, and chain of evidence following will lessen the possible issues with this technique. Additionally, a variety of qualitative and quantitative statistical tests are set up to determine associations, null hypothesis, aberrant data, and non-parametric tests on abnormal data, including cross tabulation, Kruskal Wallis, and Chai square (Pearson). This can enhance the internal validity of the study.

The SPSS27/29 program has been utilized to organize quantitative data analysis, and mean score analysis or factor analysis are two quantitative techniques that will be employed. The interviews yielded qualitative data, which is then analyzed using content analysis in NVIO20 or MAXQDA. Through this method, suitable building theory will be completed, and it will be adjusted in the following phase. In order to solve the difficulties in construction partnering projects, the third phase will provide recommendations on the roles and duties of partnering enabling elements, organizational structure, and culture etc. This will be done via the use of group method and theory building procedures.

8. CONCLUSION

According to literature, methodology plays a crucial role in achieving research aims by facilitating communication between researchers and data. While emphasizing the proper technique for the study being conducted, this paper addresses the many research philosophies and methodologies that are accessible. The research's ontological and epistemological suppositions determine the choice of research methodology and strategy as well as the proper philosophical position. This study explains the survey/interview methodology used in the research as a means of addressing the challenges of complex relationships and offering guidance on the roles and responsibilities of organizational structure, culture, and enabling elements in construction partnerships.

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