

IN THE PATHWAYS OF PIONEERS

FROM KUHN TO ELLUL : CREATING A MAP OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SHOWING THE WAY TO MORE EFFECTIVE RESEARCH IN DISABILITY

by
Ian Datson

This thesis develops an epistemology of the social and human sciences which shows how the effectiveness of scientific research in the field of disability may be improved. It is founded on the premise that the classic work of Kuhn constitutes “state of the art” knowledge about the nature of science and the fact that nearly all efforts by social scientists to apply Kuhn to the social and human sciences have been unsuccessful. In the words of Gutting (1980, p. 13), a leading authority on Kuhn’s work:

Although such accounts have not been entirely fruitless, they are entirely misdirected as efforts to exhibit the scientific status of the social sciences or to discover how to put them on the “sure path of a science.”

This thesis attempts to overcome this lack of success by utilising the pioneering works of Newman, Foucault and Ellul to legitimately extend Kuhn’s work into the social and human sciences for the purpose of applying it to the developing social science of disability. It does so with a view to understanding how research into disability may be made more effective. This extension of Kuhn into the social and human sciences is achieved through two crucial discoveries—one in each of two consecutive stages of philosophical exploration of these pioneering works.

In the first stage the epistemologies of both Kuhn and Newman are explored to determine what relationship, if any, exists between them. The rationale for this lies in the fact that Newman developed an epistemology which bears a remarkable resemblance to Kuhn’s and which he managed to apply successfully to political, religious and philosophical fields which would today be a part of the social sciences. In contrast no such application has been achieved with Kuhn’s epistemology. Hence the thinking goes that if a connection or relationship of some kind can be found between the two epistemologies it might just hold the key to extending Kuhn’s epistemology into the social and human sciences. The exploration proceeds on this basis. The difficulties involved in applying Kuhn’s epistemology to the field of disability are clearly articulated, while the relevance of Newman’s epistemology to disability is made plain through direct application to political and social movements in the field. A long search finds a correlation between the two epistemologies expressed in the form of five propositions. These propositions appear to

be sufficiently comprehensive and well enough established to make possible an accurate delineation of the extension of Kuhn’s epistemology into the social and human sciences dealt with by Newman. Thus a legitimate extension of Kuhn’s epistemology into a region of the social and human sciences is discovered—an extension which takes the form of a “partitioned field”. This partitioned field extension is immediately applied to the field of disability. Further features of the partitioned field extension are identified using Foucault’s work as a guide. These features too, are illustrated with respect to the field of disability.

However the discovery of the extension raises the question of whether or not it applies to social and human sciences other than the section dealt with by Newman. Since the task of proving the extension’s applicability to such fields as Economics, Sociology or Psychology, is too long and tangential to be within the scope of this thesis, proof is restricted to the establishment of a *prima facie* case. It acknowledges that such a case is no substitute for a formal demonstration but it has credibility because of the fact of the applicability of the extension to the field of disability—itsself a human science. The further fact that this field is multidisciplinary in nature involving at least fifteen other social sciences adds to the credibility. In spite of its wider applicability the partitioned field extension forms only a partial epistemology of the social and human sciences because it does not take into account the impact of technological innovation on scientific development. Kuhn himself realised this towards the end of his original work.

In the second stage of exploration the impact of technology on science is examined through the work of Ellul using examples taken from the field of disability. Ellul’s insights are employed to discover how the partial epistemology developed in stage one can be converted into a complete epistemology which successfully takes technology into account. This epistemology, the “Enhanced Kuhnian Structure”, constitutes the second discovery of the thesis. The structure is delineated with respect to the field of disability which is treated as a prototypical example of other social and human sciences. This application to disability casts considerable light on the nature of disability research and the problems it faces, because the Enhanced Kuhnian Structure constitutes a map of the field showing what might be called the topographic features of scientific research.

This map shows that scientific research in the field of disability is inclined to be dominated and controlled by technology—a situation which occurs because the field is partitioned. Under such circumstances, research is unlikely to make major progress beyond certain easily discernible limits because of confusion in the methods used and the impossibility of making shifts like those seen in Kuhn’s paradigms. The map reveals too, that if research in the field follows its present course its long-term future will tend to be limited by the parameters of existing partitions in addition to subjugation and even tyranny from the latest technological advances. However the Enhanced Kuhnian Structure also shows that scientific research could possibly be improved through the creation of an advanced paradigmatic structure called a “paradome” and the adoption of practices concordant with it—“dome science”.

A paradome is a data collection and theoretical research structure which has a partitioned field as a base and a focusing dome of research scientists with expert knowledge of all

the field’s partitions. It is founded on the principle that field partitions must be equally represented in a non-hierarchical way. It is designed to offset serious obstacles revealed by the Enhanced Kuhnian Structure. Dome science involves both base and focus activities. Base research is carried out within the separate partitions. Focus research involves the transformation of information into a highly detailed picture of the field’s phenomena. A paradome is autonomous in relation to technology and provides feedback on the likely effects of proposed technological innovation. Such a structure and its practices could perhaps do much to avoid the field’s long-term prognosis.

It is recommended that a paradome should be set up for the field of disability to integrate research and gain general practical acceptance for research findings. For example one of its tasks would be to enhance the construction of Quality of Life Models. A paradome would facilitate general acceptance in the field more easily than is the case with current models because it accords equal representation to each of the fields.

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INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AS BOARD MEMBERS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

by
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There has been minimal research regarding effective consumer representation and participation by people with an intellectual disability in any aspect of the management of disability organisations. Despite numerous government and policy initiatives there has been no single strategy that has been effective in addressing this issue across the disability sector.

The aim of this study was to investigate issues related to the practice of involving people with an intellectual disability as board members of disability organisations. To achieve this, a two-stage research design was implemented.

A mail-out questionnaire was developed for the first stage of the study. This was sent to chairpersons of disability organisations that provide services to individuals with an intellectual disability throughout the State of South Australia. Fifty organisations, representing a 66.7% response rate, participated in this stage. The quantitative data collected involved demographic information about disability organisations in South Australia, their boards and the extent to which individuals with an intellectual disability were involved as board members. Twenty-five organisations reported that they currently involved a board member with an intellectual disability. Questions designed to investigate the assets, challenges and strategies regarding the practice of involving individuals with an intellectual disability on boards provided responses that broadened the researcher's awareness and understanding of board practices.

In the second stage of the study, interviews designed to elicit more specific information and personal insights into the assets, challenges and strategies relating to the practices were developed. Overall, 41 interviews were conducted state wide, involving 27 chairpersons or their delegated respondent, and 14 board members with an intellectual disability.

The results highlighted the fact that individuals with an intellectual disability generally identified board membership as a positive experience. There were, however, key results which indicated that their contributions were limited, and their board membership and representative roles were not clearly defined or understood.

The results also illustrated the many challenges boards of management face in respect of facilitating board membership for individuals with an intellectual disability. The identified challenges included tokenism, conflict of interest, confidentiality, communication, adaptation, government policy and resource implications. Many strategies for addressing these issues were identified and a number of models have been developed in response to the most commonly reported strategy of third party support.

There are no black and white solutions, but a genuine belief in, and commitment to, the principles of consumer empowerment, representation and participation at the board of management level provide the scaffolding not only to support and facilitate this practice at board level, but also to integrate these principles and practices into our society.

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