



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOSOFIA

“Merged” methods.

A step beyond “mixed” methods

Giampietro Gobo
University of Milan

The resurgence of MM

- **Date:** in the late 1970s we assist to a resurgence of MM
- **Centers:** University of Nebraska, University of Michigan...
- **Fields:** psychology, nurse, education

MM are not a recent innovation

The ancient roots of European **survey research** are MM:

1. Frédéric Le Play in the **1840s**
2. Eilert Sundt in the **1850s**
3. Charles Booth in **1889**
4. B. Seebohm Rowntree in **1899**
5. Max Weber in **1907**
6. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel in the **1930s**

In USA:

- Chicago School in the **1920s**
- Helen Merrell and Robert S. Lynd in the **1930s**

Integration: the main challenge in MM

- Integration: a vague concept
- At least six forms of integration in MM:
 1. Theory integration
 2. Design integration
 3. Method integration
 4. Data integration
 5. Analysis integration
 6. Interpretation integration

Integration: **four styles** in MMR

1. Method triangulation studies
2. Third paradigm pragmatist studies
3. Theoretically integrated studies
4. Methodologically integrated studies

Integration: an alternative view

- Methods are not just (neutral or interchangeable) **tools**
- methods have an **inner force** (as the language in the Austin's speech act theory);
- the **performativity** of each method;
- Hence, methods have **agency**
- Each methods incorporates a **specific vision**
- It has a capacity of... (**partially**) constructing data
- Following ANT (Callon, Latour and so on), the research is a socio-technical network
- Hence, methods **highly concur**
(with the researcher, the participants, the research setting, the organizational and institutional constraints and opportunities) to **build** the data.

- This is why **data collected by** survey interviews, discursive interviews, focus groups, ethnographies and so on, are often different, **never overlap and not rarely conflict**
- There is a **strong link** (though not deterministic, of course) **between the type of datum** collected and the **type of research method**:
- what you get with a certain method, you do not catch with another one (see **Becker and Geer 1957**, for a comparison between participant observation and “conversational interview”).
- Methods are like **fruit trees**: each tree produces a specific fruit.
- For this reason the integration could be reach **at the level of *specific methods*** only (considering carefully and balancing their diversity),
- **not at the qualitative-quantitative one** (as MM researchers aims)

combining QT and QL within the same research project...

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 199), Blaikie (1991), Flick (1992), Silverman (1993: 156-8; 2000: 99), Mason (1996: 27), Howe (2004), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), leading **scholars outside the mixed methods community**, have pointed out:

1.a remarkable (and not always available) investment of **time and resources**;

2.the research (to be of good quality) should be conducted in **team**, because it is quite difficult for one researcher alone **to master** skillfully different methods;

as matter of fact, looking at mixed methods articles, always more they are signed by a certain number of authors, **generally ranging from 3 to 5**;

3.often inconsistency between QL and QT findings, because each method has a particular **inner performative force**, (inconsistency is an enrichment but also problematic)

4.unanswered whether mixed methods really “**provide a better understanding** of a research problem than either QI or QT research alone” (Creswell 2011: 270).

The added value of MM seems to be more a **dogma** than a statement empirically proved (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003).

Two ways to integration: “mixed” and “merged”

- **MM theorists** propose a mixed, amalgamated or blended way;
- There will be surely good reasons whether, **after decades**, these difficulties about integration *remain unsurpassed*?
- Should continue **to insist** on the way of the **(traditional) integration** or is it better to accept its impossibility and attempt other ways, i.e. a **different idea of integration**?
- My proposal moves from **a different standpoint**: *fusion* (music metaphor), *creole* (linguistic metaphor), hybrid (technology metaphor) or *merge* (business and corporation metaphor) between methods: **the distinctions disappear**
- Integration at **specific** methods only (not at QT and QL level)
- **merge specific** methods instead of just mixed them.
- Because a **merged method** is much **more consistent** and integrated, and
- poses **less problems** both in terms of data collection and analysis

Merged methods

- For example, **survey and discursive interview** can merge in the ‘inter-vey’ and the ‘calendar interview’;
- **ethnography and scaling** could be fused in the ‘mystery shopper’;
- **Group interview and survey interview** could be unify in the ‘Delphi method’.
- The methodological imagination (Smith 1975) could invent many other **new methods and techniques**.
- In **MM theorists’** **envision/ methods remain distinct**, autonomous, with their own “fruits”.
- Unlike, in merged methods integration is **full** and
- yields a **new** tool or technique, a new product, an unic method... a new fruit.
- Reaching the “**equal status**” or “**pure mixed**” coveted by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007: 123).

A new challenge

- creating **new methods**, which could combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches *in a single instrument*,
- **squeezing the advantages** of both *in a single technique*.
- With the benefit of lowering the costs and
- making **more consistent** the research findings.
- Some “merged” methods already exist:
 1. **‘Delphi’** (Dalkey and Helmer 1963, Fletcher and Marchildon 2014),
 2. **‘mystery shopper’** (Wiele van der, Hesselink and Iwaarden, van 2005),
 3. **‘calendar and time diary methods’** (Belli and Callegaro 2009),
 4. **‘conversational survey’** (Gobo and Mauceri 2014, 184ff).
- **Still others** may be invented!