

Welcome to Qualitative Research

Week 8

Part 1

Research Methods & Research Strategy

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Learning Outcomes - Research Strategy

- Understand research strategy;
- Appreciate different strategies;
- Strengths and weaknesses of the different strategies;
- Research credibility.

Research Methods - The Research Onion

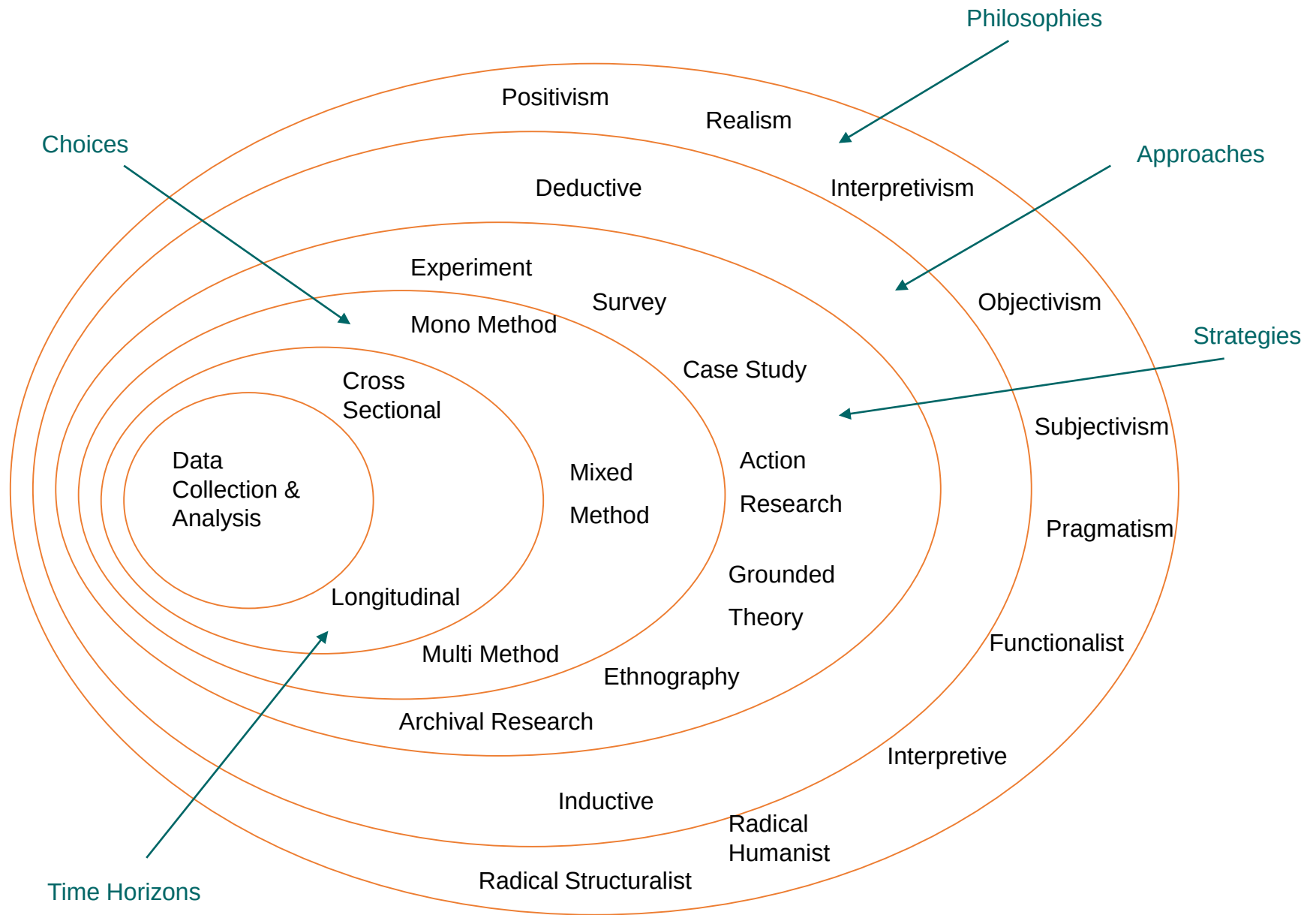
- In your research proposal you are required to describe your chosen research methods and then your data collection techniques.
- These are not the same!

Research Methods - The Research Onion

- Research methods refer to the decisions you make about the type of research you are going to do to answer your research questions.
- Data collection techniques merely describe how you are going to physically collect the data.

What is Research Strategy?

- The general plan of how you will go about addressing the research problem and answering the research questions;
- It will include:
 - Description of the nature of the research to be undertaken and the type of data to be collected;
 - Research strategy and sources of data;
 - Consideration of constraints: e.g. access, time, location, respondents, own skills, abilities and knowledge, money, credibility and ethical issues.
- Strategy is summarised in the Research Onion.



Example Research Philosophies

- **Positivism** - the belief that 'truth' is out there waiting to be discovered and the use of statistical, experimental and other numerical data, to describe the actions and phenomena we observe, and the correlations and interactions between them. This is generally labelled the 'scientific' approach.
- **Interpretivism** - Unlike natural objects, human beings can change their behaviour so interpretivists argue that if we want to understand the actions we observe, we have to explore the reasons and meanings which that action has for the people who took them. So there is no 'truth' other than that expressed and believed by the individuals we observe. Each individual may have their own 'truth'. The researcher must interpret it.

Example Research Philosophies

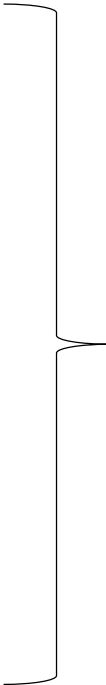
- Take the example of crime.
- A positivist would argue that researchers can simply
- measure crime using quantitative methods and identify
- patterns and correlations.
- An interpretivist would argue that sociologists need to
- understand what people mean by crime, how they
- come to categorize certain actions as 'criminal' and
- then investigate who comes to be seen as criminal in a
- particular society and why.

Research Approach

- Deductive approach
 - Start with a theory
 - Collect data to test theory
- Inductive approach
 - Start with an idea
 - Collect data
 - Develop theory as go along

Different Research Strategies

- Experiment
- Survey
- Case Study
- Grounded theory
- Ethnography
- Action research



All of these designs yield data of various types but also represent different philosophies and approaches.

Experimental Research

True experimental

It is explanatory;

Experiments are conducted to test hypotheses;

The use of comparison groups (control group) and treatment groups that have been randomly assigned;

Researcher has control over independent variables

Example: what is the effect of providing a car as an incentive to staff of a marketing department in an organisation?

Experimental Research

- Advantages
 - results are statistically reliable;
 - results are able to be generalised to the population;
 - useful for prediction, testing hypotheses.
- Disadvantages
 - statistical techniques ignore order of events;
 - resulting theory fails to take account of unique characteristics of individual cases;
 - variables arbitrarily selected and research can lead to researcher bias;
 - not appropriate and cost-effective for learning why people act or think as they do.

Survey Research

- Based often on a questionnaire, interview or focus group;
- Can be used to collect both factual data and opinions;
- Allows the collection of a large amount of data
 - from a sizeable sample;
- Standardised schedule of questions
 - which must be responded to in
 - the same order with the same
 - wording.

Survey Research

- Advantages
 - Data standardised and allows easy comparison;
 - Economical;
 - Gives the researcher control over the research process;
 - Possible to generate findings to whole population when appropriate sampling techniques used and sample representative of population.
- Disadvantages
 - Ensuring sample is representative of whole population can be time consuming;
 - Designing and piloting the questionnaire, and data analysis can be time consuming;
 - Not suitable for exploratory research.

Case Study Research

- Involves the development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single 'case' or of a small number of related 'cases';
- The case is studied in its natural setting recognizing its complexity and context;
- The purpose - to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case;
- Types of cases : a person, one organization, an episode, a process, a community, a society or any other unit of social life;
- When 'why' and 'how' questions are being asked;
- The researcher has little control over the phenomenon being investigated.

Case Study Research

Examples

A medical student studies an individual's illness.

Why did USA's expansion into NHS will not succeed when it can in other parts of the world?

Case Study Research

- Advantages

- We can learn a lot about a particular case in its own right especially if it is unusual, unique and not well understood;
- Building an in-depth understanding of the case;
- Provides important contribution with other research approaches.

- Disadvantages

- Lack of rigour;
- No basis for generalisation (reply: purpose is theoretical generalisation and not statistical generalisation);
- Too long, too much detail;
- Data collection and analysis can be time consuming;
- Research process takes too long and may result in massive, unreadable documents.

Grounded Theory Research

- A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents;
- That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon;
- Therefore data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other.

Grounded Theory Research

One does not begin with a theory, then prove it;

Rather one begins with an area of study and what is

- relevant to that area is allowed to emerge;

It involves theory building;

The theory is developed from data;

The theory generated by a series of observations

- (i.e. theory is grounded in data).
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- (*Glaser & Strauss: The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Aldine Publishing 1977*)

Grounded Theory Research

Advantages

As the theory is grounded in data, it can be used in practical applications - prediction and application should be able to give the practising manager understanding and some control of the situation;

Grounded theory can help prevent the use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity;

A useful approach for generating theories;

Since the theory represents reality, it is comprehensible and makes sense both to the persons who were studied and to those practising in the area.

Disadvantages

Can be resource intensive - data collection and analysis;

Can be time consuming;

the approach has been criticised as always building theories and does not aid practical work.

Ethnographic Research

- This means, literally, a picture of the 'way of life' of some identifiable group of people;
- The ethnographer participates in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions and collecting data;
- Ethnography can relate
 - to physical societies but
 - also to cyber and virtual
 - societies.

Ethnographic Research

- Human behavior is based upon meanings and interpretation which people attribute to and bring to situations, and that behavior is not 'caused' in any mechanical way, but it is continually constructed and reconstructed on the basis of people's interpretations of the situations they are in.

Ethnographic Research

Advantages

Provides the researcher with the opportunity to gain insight into the phenomenon under study;

A better understanding of the structures and organisation of the various processes and activities in their naturally occurring environment.

Limitations

Very time consuming;

Not dominant in business research but may be useful in certain circumstances;

'Going native'; objectivity may be compromised;

Approach can raise ethical, moral, stressful problems for the researcher - potential conflicts between their rights, obligations and interests.

Ethnographic Research

Unlikely that you will adopt this qualitative strategy

Live, breathe and eat with your participants.

Think social anthropologists living with tribes around the world.

Key is to have 'participant observation' status.

Business context:

Male dominance in the financial city of London

Difficult for women to observe and see 'true' behaviour of participants.

Action Research

- Focuses on research and action, and in particular action that promotes change in real organisations;
- The person undertaking the research is involved in this action for change;
- Research paradigm that allows you develop knowledge through practice or understanding;
- It alternates between action and critical reflection.

Action Research

- Strengths

- Useful for practitioners who wish to improve understanding of their practice;
- Useful for preliminary or pilot research before using other research strategies;
- Useful for researchers who want to engage the client as co-researchers.

- Weaknesses

- Cannot generalise;
- Does not usually provide causal explanations of what is studied;
- Does not necessarily seek explanations at a more specific level than the phenomenon it is dealing with.

Archival research

Uses administration records and company documents as principle sources.

This data analysed as product of the day to day activities, so part of the reality being studied.

So not to be confused with secondary data.

Research questions that focus on past and changes over time.

Driven in part by data available and completeness.

Choices

Mono method

- Singe data collection technique and analytical procedure used

Multimethod

- More than one data collection technique used

- Overcomes weaknesses of using only one

- Richer approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation

- Either qualitative OR quantitative data

Mixed method

- Both qualitative and quantitative research combined

- Different dimensions to how combined

- Qualitative data quantitised - ie. count number of times an event occurs

Time Horizon

Cross-sectional study

- A 'snapshot' taken at a particular time of a particular situation

- Use survey or multiple strategies ie interviews for a case study

- Time constrained

Longitudinal study

- Diary or series of snapshots representing events over a given period of time

- To study change and development

- Include a Longitudinal element by using secondary data surveys going back over years. Gives insight into a subject over a period of change

Research Credibility

- Ensuring your research evidence, findings and conclusion can stand up to scrutiny;
- Reducing the possibility of getting wrong answers means that attention should be paid to two concepts -
 - Reliability
 - Validity.

Research Credibility

- **Reliability:**

- To rely on, to depend confidently upon, measurement free from error, yielding consistent results:
 - Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions?
 - Will similar observations be reached by other observers?
 - Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data?

Research Credibility

- Can we improve reliability?
 - Participant error - e.g. questionnaire on productivity administered on monday and friday may produce different results;
 - Participant bias e.g. participants giving answers they want management to hear;
 - Observer error - 3 or more interviewers eliciting answers differently in questionnaire administration;
 - Observer bias - possibility of different ways of interpreting results.

Research Credibility

- Validity:
- whether findings are really about what they appear to be about;
- addresses the question: how do we know that this instrument (e.g. questionnaire) is measuring what we think or wish to measure (e.g. productivity, satisfaction, motivation, participation);
- Threats to validity
 - Lack of generalisability;
 - Poor identification of research population;
 - Poor data collection;
 - Illogical data interpretation;
 - Development of unsupported conclusions.