

Qualitative Research

SBPD7002

Week 2

The research 'onion'

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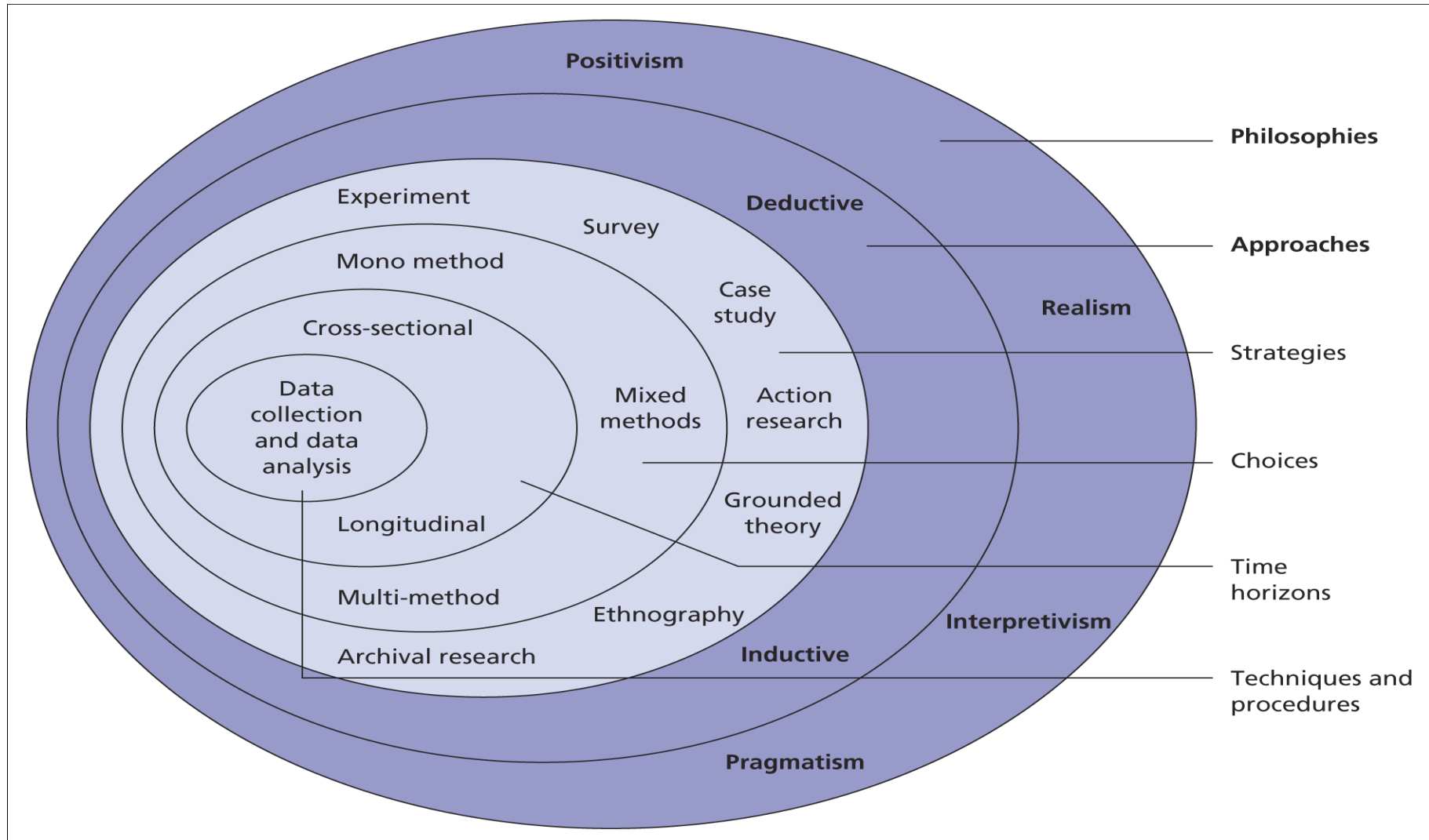
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Underlying issues of data collection & analysis

The research 'onion'



Understanding your research philosophy

Thinking about research philosophy

- Ontology: is concerned with nature of reality.
- Raise the questions of the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and commitment held to particular views.

Ontology

- The first aspect of ontology we discuss is **objectivism**. This portrays the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence.
- The second aspect, **subjectivism** holds that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence

Epistemology

- It concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study.
- Closely coupled with ontology and its consideration of what constitutes reality, **epistemology considers views about the most appropriate ways of enquiring into the nature of the world** (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008) and
- **‘what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of knowledge’** (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).
- Questions of epistemology begin to consider the research method, and Eriksson and Kovalainen go on to discuss how epistemology defines how knowledge can be produced and argued for.

Axiology

- Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgments about value.
- Although this may include values we possess in the fields of aesthetics and ethics, it is the process of social enquiry with which we are concerned here.
- The role that your own values play in all stages of the research process is of great importance if you wish your research results to be credible.

Understanding your research philosophy (4)

Aspects of philosophy

- Positivism - the stance of the natural scientist
- Realism - direct and critical realism
- Interpretivism – researchers as ‘social actors’
- Axiology – studies judgements about value

Positivism

- Positivism can be defined as “research approaches that **employ empirical methods**, make extensive **use of quantitative analysis**, or develop logical calculi to build **formal explanatory theory**”

Realism

- Is another philosophical position which relates to scientific enquiry.
- The essence of realism is that **what the senses show us as reality is the truth**; that objects have an existence independent of the human mind.
- In this sense, realism is opposed to idealism, the theory that only the mind and its contents exist

Direct realism and critical realism

- It says that what you see is what you get: what we experience through our senses portrays the world accurately.
- **critical realism:** critical realists argue that we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly.
 - Critical realists point out how often our senses deceive us.

Interpretivism

- Interpretivism advocates it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors.
- **This emphasizes the differences between conducting research among people rather than objects** such as trucks and computers.

Interpretivism

- Interpretive research is concerned with the meanings that people attach to **norms, rules, and values that regulate their interactions.**
- Care is taken not to impose a previous understanding of norms, rules, and values on others but rather to **understand their beliefs and actions from their point of view.**
- The focus is not only on what they tell us directly about the reasons for their beliefs and actions but also on the social practices that underlie them.
- Social practice gives meaning to social action

Pragmatism

- Pragmatism holds that the most important determinant of the epistemology, ontology, axiology adopted is the **research question**.

Research paradigms

Definition

‘A way of examining social phenomenon from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted’

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Research Approaches (1)

Deduction

5 sequential stages of testing theory

- Deducing a hypothesis
- Expressing the hypothesis operationally
- Testing the operational hypothesis
- Examining the specific outcome of the enquiry
- Modifying the theory (if necessary)

Adapted from Robson (2002)

Research Approaches (2)

Characteristics of Deduction

- Explaining causal relationships between variables
- Establishing controls for testing hypotheses
- Independence of the researcher
- Concepts operationalized for quantitative measurement
- Generalisation

Research Approaches (3)

Induction

Building theory by –

- Understanding the way human build their world
- Permitting alternative explanations of what 's going on
- Being concerned with the context of events
- Using more qualitative data
- Using a variety of data collection methods

Choosing your research approach

The right choice of approach helps you to

- Make a more informed decision about the research design
- Think about which strategies will work for your research topic
- Adapt your design to cater for any constraints

Adapted from Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008)

Combining research approaches

Things worth considering

- The nature of the research topic
- The time available
- The extent of risk
- The research audience – managers and markers

Deductive and Inductive research

Major differences between these approaches

Deduction emphasises

- scientific principles
- moving from theory to data
- the need to explain causal relationships between variables
- the collection of quantitative data
- the application of controls to ensure validity of data
- the operationalisation of concepts to ensure clarity of definition
- a highly structured approach
- researcher independence of what is being researched
- the necessity to select samples of sufficient size in order to generalise conclusions

Induction emphasises

- gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to events
- a close understanding of the research context
- the collection of qualitative data
- a more flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as the research progresses
- a realisation that the researcher is part of the research process
- less concern with the need to generalise

Saunders *et al*, (2009)

Summary: Chapter 4

Research philosophy

- relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge
- contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world

Summary: Chapter 4

Three major ways of thinking about research philosophy

- Epistemology
- Ontology – objectivism and subjectivism
- Axiology

Summary: Chapter 4

Social science paradigms can generate fresh insights into real-life issues and problems

Four of the paradigms are:

Functionalist

Radical humanist

Interpretive

Radical structuralist

Summary: Chapter 4

The two main research approaches are

Deduction - theory and hypothesis are developed and tested

Induction – data are collected and a theory developed from the data analysis

Chapter 5

Formulating the research design

The Process of Research Design

- Research choices
- Research strategies
- Time horizons

Research Design

The research design needs

- Clear objectives derived from the research question
- To specify sources of data collection
- To consider constraints and ethical issues
- Valid reasons for your choice of design

Classification of the research purpose

Exploratory research

- is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light'.
- Useful if you wish to clarify your understanding of a problem, such as if you are unsure of precise nature of the problem.
- It may well be that time is well spent on exploratory research, as it may show that the research is not worth pursuing!

Explanatory

- There are three principal ways of conducting explanatory research:
- A search of the literature;
- Interviewing ‘experts’ in the subject;
- Conducting focus group interviews.

Descriptive studies

- The object of descriptive research is ‘ to ‘portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations’.
- This may be an extension of, or a forerunner to a piece of exploratory research or, more often, a piece of explanatory research.
- It is necessary to have a clear picture of the phenomena on which you wish to collect data prior to collection of data.

Explanatory research

- Studies that establish causal relationships between variables may be termed explanatory research.
- The emphasis here is on studying a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationship between variables.

Research Strategies

Experiment

Action research

Grounded theory

Survey

Ethnography

Case study

Archival research

Research Strategies

An experiment will involve

- Definition of a theoretical hypothesis
- Selection of samples from known populations
- Random allocation of samples
- Introduction of planned intervention
- Measurement on a small number of dependent variables
- Control of all other variables

Research Strategies

Survey: key features

- Popular in business research
- Perceived as authoritative
- Allows collection of quantitative data
- Data can be analysed quantitatively
- Samples need to be representative
- Gives the researcher independence
- Structured observation and interviews can be used

Research Strategies

Case Study: key features

- Provides a rich understanding of a real life context
- Uses and triangulates multiple sources of data

A case study can be categorised in four ways
and based on two dimensions:

single case v. multiple case

holistic case v. embedded case

Yin (2003)

Research Strategies

Action research: key features

- Research IN action - not ON action
- Involves practitioners in the research
- The researcher becomes part of the organisation
- Promotes change within the organisation
- Can have two distinct foci (Schein, 1999) –
the aim of the research and the needs of the sponsor

Research Strategies

Grounded theory: key features

- Theory is built through induction and deduction
- Helps to predict and explain behaviour
- Develops theory from data generated by observations
- Is an interpretative process, not a logico-deductive one

Based on Suddaby (2006)

Research Strategies

Ethnography: key features

- Aims to describe and explain the social world inhabited by the researcher
- Takes place over an extended time period
- Is naturalistic
- Involves extended participant observation

Research Strategies

Archival research: key features

- Uses administrative records and documents as the principal sources of data
- Allows research questions focused on the past
- Is constrained by the nature of the records and documents

Research Strategies

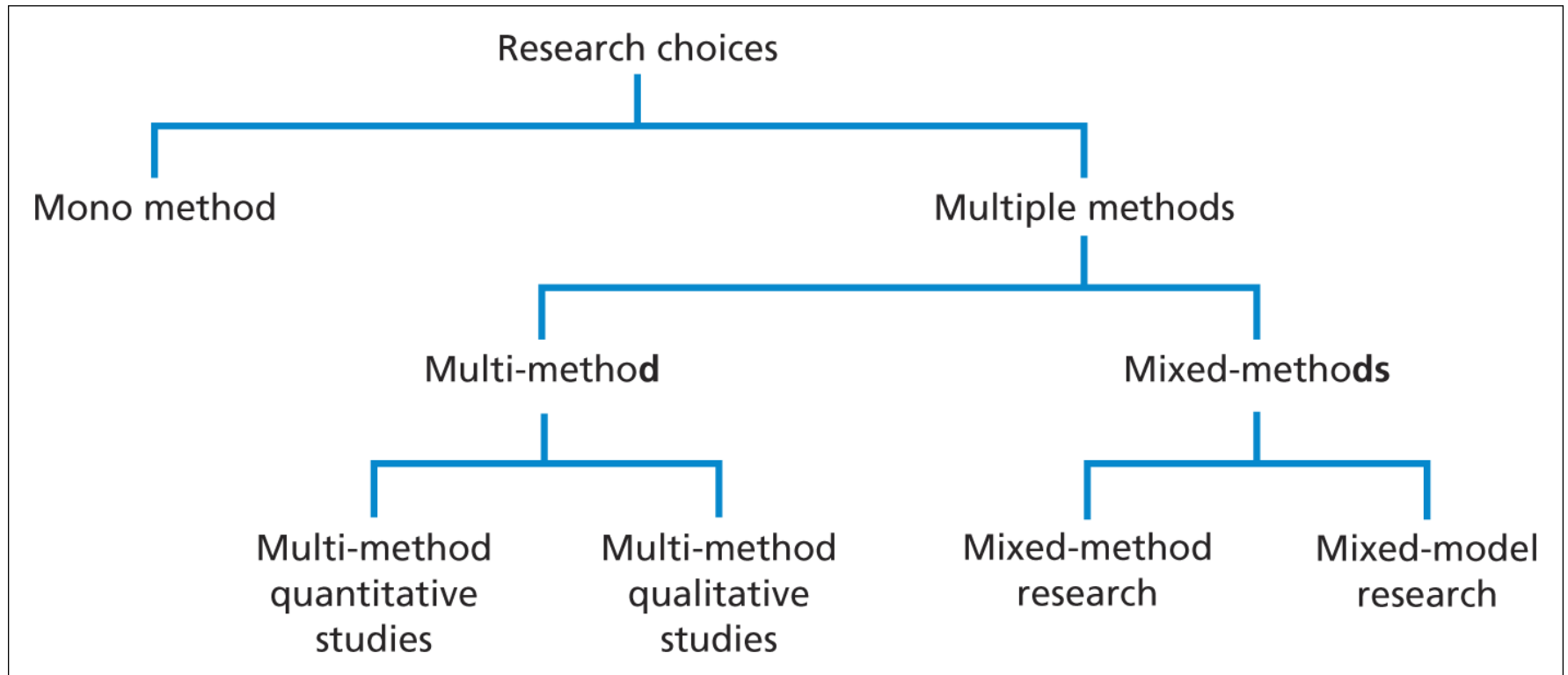
The role of the practitioner-researcher

Key features

- Research access is more easily available
- The researcher knows the organisation
- Has the disadvantage of familiarity
- The researcher is likely to their own assumptions and preconceptions
- The dual role requires careful negotiation

Multiple research methods

Research choices



Saunders *et al*, (2009)

Multiple research methods

Reasons for using mixed method designs:

- Triangulation
- Facilitation
- Complementarity
- Generality
- Aid interpretation
- Study different aspects
- Solving a puzzle

Source: developed from Bryman (2006)