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THE GLOBAL MANAGEMENT SERIES

Research Methods *for* Business & Management

Second edition



(G)

Research Methods for Business & Management:

A Guide to Writing Your Dissertation

*Firstly ... nothing exists;
secondly ... even if anything exists, it is incomprehensible by man;
thirdly .., even if anything is comprehensible, it is guaranteed to be inexpressible
and incommunicable to one's neighbour.*

Gorgias 500 BC, quoted in Aristotle, *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* 980a:19–20

THE GLOBAL MANAGEMENT SERIES

Research Methods for Business & Management

Second edition

A guide to writing your dissertation

Kevin O’Gorman and Robert MacIntosh

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Dedications

To my beautiful wife Anne and our children Euan, Eilidh and Eva. There is nothing better in life than to spend time with you. Thank you.

RMacI

To my mother for the constant and continued support, and Diana and Keith for the never ending dinners, and Maggie for some excellent words and rather fine sentences, I could not have done it without you.

KDO

Acknowledgments

The genesis of this book lay in a search for a text that could be used to guide students through the challenges of preparing a dissertation. Having failed to find something which inspired us, we were struck by the vast experience available within our own institution. This book draws upon the talents and accumulated wisdom of our colleagues in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. To our colleagues at Goodfellow Publishers, we remain indebted. Sally, Tim and Mac each showed a willingness to help bring a complex project to market in an unrealistically short time scale. Their calm and stoic acceptance of the production schedule were much appreciated and the professionalism of their work was exceptional. Thomas Farrington played a key role in checking and polishing the manuscript and we are also indebted to him for the speed and accuracy of his work.

KDO & RMacI

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Nigel Caldwell is a Reader at Heriot-Watt School of Management and Languages. He has worked at Bradford, Plymouth and Bath Universities. Prior to his academic career, he worked at a leading UK automotive manufacturer; gaining first-hand experience of Japanese supply techniques such as JIT, Kanban and Total Quality Management implementation. His research today explores the fields of Operations and Supply Management. Nigel publishes in journals such as *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* and *Industrial Marketing Management*. He has generated research income approaching three quarters of a million pounds from the UK Engineering and Physical Research Council.

Ross Curran is a PhD student at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where he is an active member of the Intercultural Research Centre. His primary research interests focus on improving volunteer management practises in the third sector, while he has published papers exploring PPT in the developed world, and authenticity consumption at tourist sites in Japan. His PhD thesis is concerned with fostering greater utilisation of the heritage inherent in many third sector organisations.

Mike Danson is Professor of Enterprise Policy at Heriot-Watt University and has worked widely on issues about urban and regional economic development, island and rural economies and enterprises, demographic change, volunteering, Gaelic, microbreweries and poverty. He has published 13 edited books and over 200 papers. He has advised parliaments, governments, and such organisations as the OECD, European Commission, Scottish Enterprise. Mike was recently awarded the prize for the best book

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Thomas Farrington is a Post-Doctoral Research Associate in Management and Organisation at Heriot-Watt University. His research examines contemporary issues in business and management, with particular emphasis on marketing and cultural authenticity; management practice and business ethics; consumer identity and tourism; colonial legacies and intercultural studies. Thomas has taught at South East European University in Tetovo and at the University of Edinburgh, from which he received his doctorate, and where he was Co-Director of the Scottish Universities' International Summer School. His work has most recently appeared in the *Journal of American Studies*, *Research in Hospitality Management*, and the *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Keith Gori is a doctoral researcher in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. His doctoral research engages with Consumer Culture Theory, identity and consumer narratives in the context of the British Home Front during World War Two. More widely his research interests lie in consumer and marketing history, the historical development of thinking surrounding the social responsibilities of business, and experiential marketing. He has presented both historical and contemporary research outputs at international marketing conferences and has published work in the *Journal of Marketing Management*. He teaches on global management and marketing courses in the Department of Business Management.

Emma Hill is a PhD student in the department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University. She holds a BA(Hons) in English Studies from the University of Exeter and a MA in English Literary Studies from the University of York. Her current research is focused on the ways in which migrant peoples make themselves heard in both the public and private spheres, particularly with reference to the Somali population in Glasgow. More generally, her interests include topics concerning migration, identity, memory, place and text.

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Robert MacIntosh is Professor of Strategy and Head of the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. He trained as an engineer and has worked at the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde. His research on the ways in which top teams develop strategy and on organizational change has been published in a wide range of outlets. He has a long-standing interest in research methods for business and management studies and has published on the relevance of management research using methods that include ethnography and action research. He has consulted extensively with public and private sector organizations and sits on the board of the charity Turning Point Scotland.

Andrew MacLaren is Programme Director of the MSc in International Fashion Marketing in the Department of Business Management, Heriot-Watt University. His PhD explored business elites in the international hotel industry and his current research remains focussed on service products, informed by literature relevant to leadership, entrepreneurship and consumption. With diverse research links across luxury fashion, aviation and the hotel industry, his outlook is international and he works closely with industry throughout Europe, North America, the Middle East, India and China. He has published widely in the field on multiple topics, contributing in the domains of theory, method and industry practice and he continues to work towards interdisciplinary collaborations that engage with multiple fields of research through his extensive industry network.

Gavin Maclean is a PhD Student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. His PhD thesis examines the work of professional musicians in terms of labour process theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. More widely he is interested in sociological study of work and employment and 'symbolic' forms of work, particularly cultural production, public sector work and multilingualism in the workplace. He teaches on Human Resource and Critical Approaches to Management courses.

Kevin O'Gorman is Professor of Management and Business History and Head of Business Management in the School of Languages and Management in Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. He trained in Glasgow, Salamanca and Rome as a philosopher, theologian and historian. His research interests have a dual focus: origins, history and cultural practices of hospitality, and philosophical, ethical and cultural underpinnings of contemporary management practices. Using a wide range of methodological approaches he has published over 80 journal articles, books, chapters, and conference papers in business and management.

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Catherine Porter is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Accountancy, Economics and Finance at Heriot-Watt University. In the past she has been a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, and also worked for the public sector in the UK Department for International Development. She is an economist, specialising in the economics of developing countries, with a particular focus on Africa. She has been involved in the design and fieldwork of several large-scale quantitative surveys in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Her research involves the statistical analysis of such quantitative surveys to answer questions around the measurement of poverty, and the effectiveness of policies that aim to reduce poverty.

James Richards is an Associate Professor in Human Resource Management in the School of Languages and Management in Heriot-Watt University, and an Academic Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. James has published research in human resource management journals, edited book collections and consultancy based reports. James' research interests are grounded in industrial sociology and employment relations. Early research projects looked at employee use of social media for misbehaviour and resistance. His more recent research looks at hidden disabilities in the workplace and he is currently working on a range of in-work poverty projects. James is the Research Ethics Officer for the School of Management & Languages.

John Sanders is an Associate Professor in Management in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. He teaches strategic management courses to both undergraduate and post-graduate students. In addition, he teaches a small business management course to final year undergraduate students. Strategic fit within a university setting was the subject of his PhD. His past research efforts have focused on Internet portals, website quality, social networks and the market reach of rural small firms in Scotland.

Katherine Sang is an Associate Professor of Management in the Department of Business Management. Using feminist theory, her research examines how gender inequality is maintained in male dominated professions, including the creative industries and academia. In addition, Kate is researching gender and in-work poverty and supervising PhDs exploring organisational culture, gender and behaviour change. She is the Postgraduate Research Coordinator for Business Management, as well as serving on the University Undergraduate Studies Committee and Equality and Diversity Advisory

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Rafał Sitko is a Ph.D. student in Business and Management at Heriot-Watt University with research interests primarily in diversity management and inclusion. His work focuses on explaining intersections of privilege and oppression in a workplace and their effects on migrants' work experience. Rafał received an MSc in International Human Resource Management and Employment Relations from Queen Mary, University of London (2012) and a BA in Psychology and Management (2011) from University of Bradford. During student exchange programs Rafał also studied Employment Relations at Hosei University in Tokyo (2010) and Business Administration at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (2009).

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Vera Tens is currently a PhD student in the Department of Business Management at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. She has an engineering degree from a German university specialising in wood science and technology. She worked in the German timber industry for several years before coming to Edinburgh to do an MBA at Edinburgh Napier University. Before joining Heriot-Watt's PhD programme she worked for a family-owned Scottish company, which raised the interest in doing a PhD in the field of family firms. Her current research interest is future family generations in SMEs, using a stakeholder theory perspective.

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Institutions. Alastair's work is driven by his active industry experience as a senior operational manager and recruiter for a branded organisation. Other projects include spirituality and commitment, and further understanding people's desire, as opposed to their need, to work.

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Preface

After many years of working with undergraduate, postgraduate and research students we recognise only too well the struggles that they often experience wrestling with the somewhat strange and seemingly obtuse language used to describe research philosophy. We once experienced similar difficulties and empathise with the confusion and lack of confidence that flows from being unclear whether you have really understood terms such as *methodology*, *ontology* or *epistemology*. We set out to produce a text that dealt with two problems. The first was to provide something that guides novice researchers through the whole process from identifying a topic to the writing up of findings via engagement with the literature and a brief overview of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The second problem we wanted to tackle related to what we often refer to as ‘the ologies’. Here we wanted to offer a structured approach to familiarising yourself with the terminology and to demonstrate how a nested set of descriptions builds towards a coherent, comprehensive and consistent articulation of your research paradigm.

We are indebted to our colleagues for their help in delivering on the first of these two problems in the first edition of the book. This was achieved at a pace which seemed frankly ridiculous but which produced a remarkably coherent guide for novice researchers. Despite positive feedback on many aspects of the first edition from both students and colleagues, we were however convinced that we could improve in relation to ‘the ologies’.

For this reason, the second edition features some relatively minor changes to many chapters and a complete rewrite of our account of research philosophy. Central to the revised text is the methods map (see Chapter 4), which sets out a logical process for researchers to articulate their position in relation to five key aspects of their research philosophy. We have road tested this approach with many colleagues and students to ensure that it is clear and concise. In addition, we have developed a free app to accompany the book and this enables novice researcher to quickly develop a comprehensive justification of their particular research design in an interactive way. We would acknowledge that the methods map makes some simplifications and would suggest that for all but the most sophisticated of purposes, this is entirely appropriate. Indeed, if you are well enough versed in the philo-

sophical nuances of knowledge explored in the method map then you are probably not part of our intended audience since you already possess the skills, confidence and capacity to articulate and defend the underpinning philosophical assumptions of your research. For everyone else, we hope that the second edition of *Research Methods for Business and Management* helps demystify the dreaded 'ologies'.

Introduction to the Second Edition

Outside the academic community, the terms *thesis* and *dissertation* are interchangeable. At Heriot-Watt and other universities in the United Kingdom, the term thesis is usually associated with a PhD (doctoral degree), while dissertation is the more common term for a substantial project submitted as part of a taught masters degree (e.g. MSc) or an undergraduate degree (e.g. MA, BSc, BBA etc.).

Often thinking about, rather even than writing, your dissertation is the most stressful part of your degree. It does not need to be. Doing your dissertation is not unrelated to the rest of the writing you have done during your time at university. Many of the skills you already possess can be applied to the dissertation writing process. Identifying the purpose of your project, expressing originality and significance, setting appropriate goals, and maintaining strong organization will help you to develop a high quality dissertation.

Regardless of the information given in this book the most important advice is to engage with your supervisors! Be sure to speak with them throughout the process of writing your dissertation. Be clear about goals and deadlines. When you meet, have questions prepared and make sure you understand their directions. Be proactive about solving problems, rather than withdrawing. Take notes and use the time wisely.

Dissertations have always played a significant role in the awarding of a degree. Originally universities were established with advanced degrees being offered in the vocations of medicine, law, and theology. Over time, the universities have adapted to accommodate changing economic and social structures and demand for skills. Indeed, Whitehead (1932, p. 138f) in an essay welcoming the opening of the Harvard Business School observed,

“The universities are schools of education and schools of research. But the primary reason for their existence is not to be found either in the mere knowledge conveyed to the students or in the mere opportunities for research afforded to the members of the faculty... The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning...”

When the Harvard Business School began, the university was the learning environment and some compromise had been reached between the idealist liberal vision and what Newman (1907, p. 156) called “the disciples of a low utilitarianism”. John Paul II (2000, p. 3) elaborates the mission of a university and states that it is the duty of academics and researchers to make “universities ‘cultural laboratories’ in which theology, philosophy, human sciences and natural sciences may engage in constructive dialogue” and observes that in universities “there is an increased tendency to reduce the horizon of knowledge to what can be measured and to ignore any question touching on the ultimate meaning of reality.” There is considerable scope within a university business school for a genuine plurality of views and disagreement leading to constructive dialogue and contributing to the enhancement of scholarship.

Once, science, engineering and technology, medicine, the law, and divinity were firmly established and a balance between the vocational and the liberal was pursued. Today, some courses may need to recapture some of the values and characteristics of the traditional higher vocations, however, unfortunately, this is not always possible, so often contract trumps covenant in a wide range of contemporary occupations. Far from the demise of the middle class career predicted by some, professionalism and flexibility are highly desirable general features of *graduateness*; learning to learn and the formation of capacities in general should take precedence over the acquisition of specific content. Imagination and creativeness must complement flexibility and cold hard knowledge as preparation for a world of rapid and continuous change; it’s a question of balance.

In many sectors of our society, science is seen as being little short of infallible; anything else must be dismissed as fancy. Even in business journals there is the tendency to trust the so-called hard facts of statistically analysed quantitative data rather than the interpretive results that qualitative analysis tends to produce. However, the physicist Richard Feynman warned his students that when they did research, and before publishing their results, they should think of every possible way in which they might be wrong; whilst another physicist, Alan Lightman, explains the vital importance of this self-questioning approach: “In science, as in other activities, there is a tendency to find what we’re looking for” (Lightman, 1996, p. 104. Feynman’s comment is found on p106).

The ability to take an imaginative leap, beyond accepted scientific dogma and the entrenched views of academic colleagues, disciplinary boundaries, or even apparent common sense, has been at the heart of a significant number of scientific or technological advances in the last few hundred years. For example, throughout most of the 20th century, in medical circles the conventional wisdom was gastric juice caused ulcers, until a pioneering doctor infected himself with a bacterium thus proving that conventional wisdom was incorrect and winning the Nobel Prize for medicine (Van Der Weyden, Armstrong, & Gregory, 2005). In universities today, ethical approval processes might challenge the wisdom, or at least the legal probity, of infecting yourself or indeed others. Nevertheless, the undercurrent in any study of research methods is the slow realisation that everything that we ‘know’, even in domains that appear to be based on objective fact or cold hard logic can be questioned. As the physicist Max Planck said, “New ideas are not generated by deduction, but by an artistically creative imagination ... Science, like the humanities, like literature, is an affair of the imagination” (McFague, 1982, p. 72).

Kevin O’Gorman & Robert MacIntosh

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4

Mapping Research Methods

Kevin O’Gorman and Robert MacIntosh

For no apparent reason, research philosophy tends to send dissertation students into a mild panic. The befuddlement caused by a range of new terminology relating to the philosophy of knowledge is unnecessary when all that you are trying to achieve is some clarity over the status of any knowledge claims you make in your study. Business and Management sits within the broader context of the social sciences, and this chapter offers a guide to the standard philosophical positions required to specify the particular form of research you plan to undertake. Collectively, these positions will define what we refer to as a research paradigm (see Figure 4.1: Methods Map). For us, a comprehensive articulation of a research design draws together five layers of interlocking choices that you, the researcher, should make when specifying how you plan to execute your research. There is no single ‘right’ way to undertake research, but there are distinct traditions, each of which tends to operate with its own, internally consistent, set of choices.

The Methods Map in Figure 4.1 offers a clear and structured approach that will ensure that you can identify each of the choices you are making in selecting your research design for your project. The process of developing a research design begins with the location of your proposed work within a particular research paradigm. Certain methods of data gathering and analysis tend to follow from certain paradigms, although it is important to notice that these implied pathways are not fixed. What is truly important is your ability to recognise and justify the interlocking choices which represent your own research design. Later chapters will deconstruct and explain the subsequent stages of the Map, namely those choices relating to both data gathering and data analysis. The sections that follow in this chapter relate to the starting point of the Methods Map, labelled ‘Research Paradigm.’ We

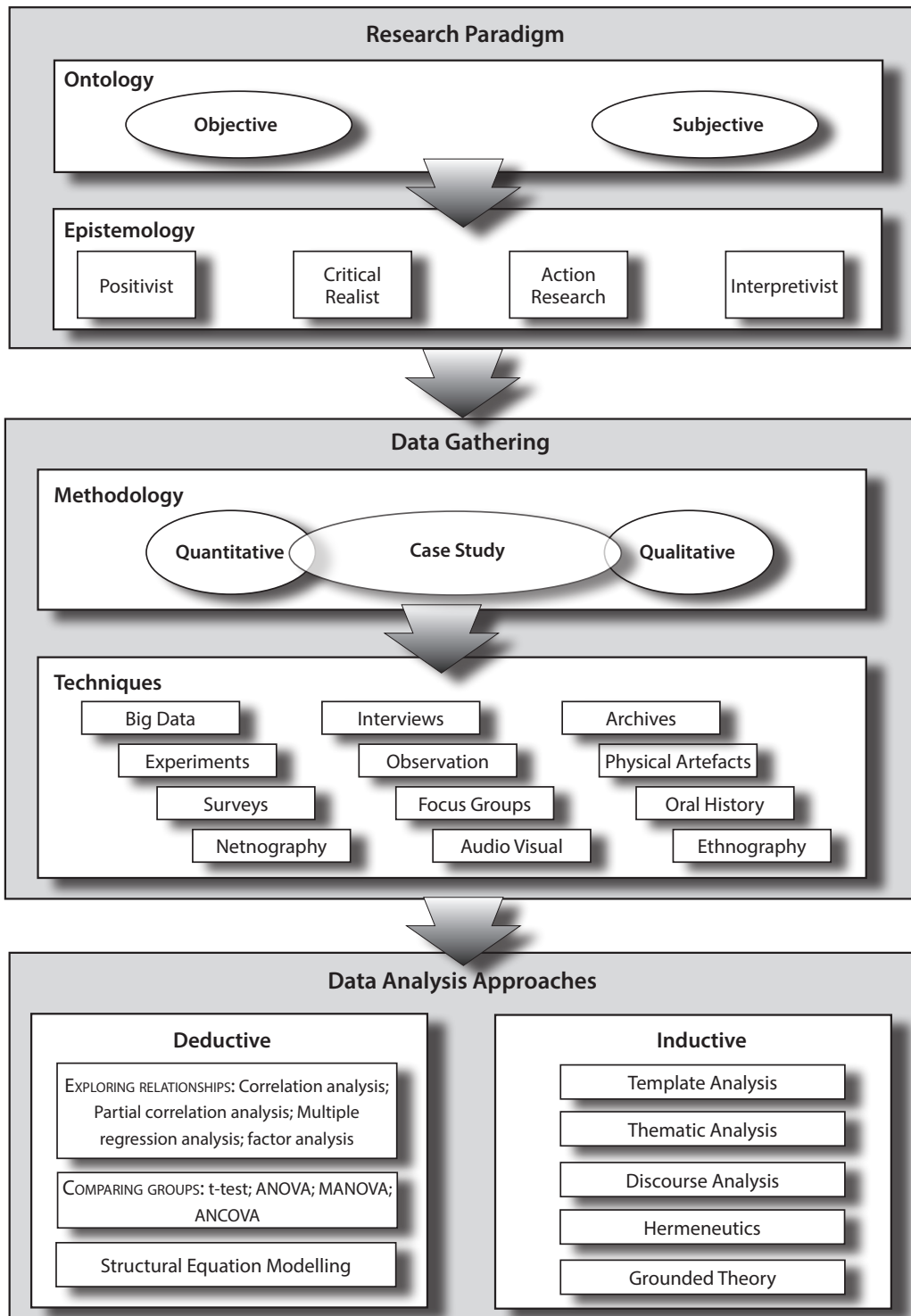


Figure 4.1: Methods Map

shall first consider the reasons for articulating a research philosophy, before exploring objective and subjective ontologies, and the epistemological positions known as positivism, critical realism, action research and interpretivism. In passing, we will also look at rhetoric (the study of persuasive language) and axiology (the study of value) as a means of rounding out your understanding of some key phrases and concepts.

Whilst these concepts emanate from philosophy, it is not necessary to have studied philosophy in order to make sense of the terminology. In essence, the purpose of setting out your research philosophy is to help signal to other researchers those claims you might make in your findings, and the basis on which you would make such claims. However, it is highly likely that the same broad research question or objective could have been approached using a very different style of research. All that you are required to do is demonstrate that you engaged in a conscientious selection and defence of what you deemed to be the most suitable approach, given your chosen topic. Historically, certain paradigms may have been used for certain topics and methods, yet it would be foolhardy to dismiss the potential for innovation to be found in combining ideas and mixing methods.

Some of the ideas that follow may at first seem challenging and difficult to work with. As a health warning, we would acknowledge that we have made some simplifying assumptions in the approach that we have set out. Those well versed in the philosophy of knowledge may take issue with some aspects of our presentation here. However, we are confident that the structured approach we are proposing will suffice for the vast majority of individuals tasked with articulating a methods statement. Let's first look at why this is important.

Articulating a research philosophy

When undertaking any research project it is considered good practice to clearly outline the basis for claiming to know what we know. Kuhn (1971) set in place the tradition that once a paradigm is chosen it is advisable for the researcher to remain within it. For the purposes of this discussion, a paradigm, as defined by Harré (1987, p. 3), is considered to be "a combination of a metaphysical theory about the nature of the objects in a certain field of interest and a consequential method which is tailor-made to acquire knowledge of those objects." At the philosophical level it could be perceived as dualistic if the researcher were to argue simultaneously that they believe

that social reality is separate and external, whilst maintaining that reality is merely a construction of the mind. Hussey and Hussey (1997) emphasise the importance of researchers recognising and understanding their philosophical orientations within the paradigm adopted for a specific project.

In 1781 Immanuel Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1780/1998) and caused a revolution in philosophy. Kant argued that there are ways of knowing about the world other than through direct observation, and that people use these all the time. This proposition provided the platform for the launch of many of the ideas associated with research philosophy. Kant's view proposes considering not how our representations may necessarily conform to objects as such, but rather how objects may necessarily conform to our representations.

Prior to this, objects were considered in isolation, separate, and unchangeable. Kant theorised that things could be considered as objects of experience: *phenomena*, rather than things in themselves (specified negatively as unknown beyond our experience): *noumena*. Therefore, if human faculties of representation are used to study these phenomena, *a priori* conceptualisations can be envisaged. An 'a priori' judgement is based on theory and argument rather than verified by experiment. For example, if we had only ever had the experience of sitting in chairs before and we saw a stool for the first time, rather than categorise it as unknown, we could conceptualise *a priori* that it would be possible to sit on a stool just like we do on a chair. Kant also showed how flawless logic can prove the existence of God and at the same time prove that there is no God at all; illustrating that opposing philosophies can be equally logical and at the same time contradictory and incomplete: a salient warning to any emergent researcher defending their philosophical stance.

The roots of research method

Gorgias, a fifth century Sophist, is remembered for his provocative aphorisms. The most notable is his treatise *On What is Not*:

"Firstly ... nothing exists;

secondly ... even if anything exists, it is incomprehensible by man;

thirdly ..., even if anything is comprehensible, it is guaranteed to be inexpressible and incommunicable to one's neighbour"

(Gorgias 500 BC, quoted in Arist. De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia 980a: 19–20)

Gorgias' treatise *On What is Not* is just a rhetorical parody of philological and rhetorical philosophical doctrines. The aphorism deals with ontology, epistemology and introduces the problem of rhetoric and language in a world where communication was shifting from the spoken to the written word. Plato (Phaedrus) in 320 BC argued that writing would deteriorate memory, wreak havoc on logical constructions, and create an artificial reality. Yet despite being written 2500 years ago, Gorgias' writing neatly summarises the central concepts of this chapter. Before exploring some philosophical concepts (first relating to ontology), Table 4.1 gives the meaning of some commonly used terms:

Table 4.1: Some commonly used terms. Adapted from O'Gorman (2008)

Term	Meaning
Axiology	The branch of philosophy dealing with values, as those of ethics, aesthetics, or religion.
Deduction	<i>a priori</i> argument: deriving a proof or using evidence to test a hypotheses.
Epistemology	The branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity. • The study of knowledge • Theories of what constitutes knowledge and understanding of phenomena • How we explain ourselves as knowers, how we arrive at our beliefs
Induction	<i>a posteriori</i> argument, deriving knowledge from empirical investigation.
Metaphysics	The branch of philosophy concerned with the ultimate nature of existence.
Ontology	The branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being and of reality.
Methodology	The study and application of methods.
Paradigm	Theoretical framework, within which research is conducted.
Philosophy	The academic discipline concerned with making explicit the nature and significance of ordinary and scientific beliefs, and with investigating the intelligibility of concepts by means of rational argument concerning their presuppositions, implications, and interrelationships; in particular, the rational investigation of the nature and structure of reality (metaphysics), the resources and limits of knowledge (epistemology), the principles and import of moral judgment (ethics), and the relationship between language and reality (semantics).
Reflexivity	Critical self-awareness and examination of beliefs and knowledge-claims. • Need for conscious, reflexive thinking about our own thinking, and critique our pre-understandings, and their effect on our research
Rhetoric	The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively. • In particular the style of speaking or writing, especially the language of a particular subject as used in the dissertation process

Ontology

As the Methods Map shows, the first stage in formulating your research design is to articulate your ontology. In the most basic sense this means that you must articulate whether you see the world as objective or subjective. We'll define both terms in a moment but first let's look at ontology. The term ontology is rarely used beyond academic institutions and it can be difficult to know how to use it confidently. As with much specialist terminology, a brief look at the linguistic components that form the word can help to unlock a more practical meaning. If you can understand and use the word 'biology' (where 'bios' means life) then you can do the same with ontology and epistemology. Biology is the study of life since the suffix ('-logy') is derived from 'logos', which in this context can be taken to mean the 'study of.' The word 'Ontos,' which provides the root 'onto-', at its most basic means 'being' or 'reality'. Therefore ontology is the study of being or reality. In lay terms it may be considered as how we view reality.

Outside of science fiction and fantasy novels, we might think of there being only one reality, in which we live, breathe, and die. Yet the aforementioned fictions are often inspired by the thought experiments through which philosophers and theorists question our understanding of reality. The most well-known of these is the brain-in-a-vat scenario, whereby a scientist stimulates a disembodied brain with such precision as to simulate an entirely realistic participation in what we call reality. Does the brain experience reality, or is the experience of the scientist somehow more real? In more contemporary terms, popular stories such as the Narnia novels or the Matrix film series are based on the premise of stepping into a different reality. In ontological terms, the philosophical notion of solipsism asserts that since we cannot know other minds, the world and those other minds do not exist. Similarly, a nihilist ontology contends that knowledge is impossible, and that there is no such thing as reality. A rather more mundane example of an altered reality relates to illness or pain: do we experience the world in the same way when we are suffering? For example, if you were asked to remove a hot dish from an oven, you would instinctively look to put a protective glove on your hand to perform this task. You would do this because you would expect to feel pain in your hand if you attempted to remove the dish without protection. The pain would be caused by your nervous system reacting to the heat of the dish so as to protect the skin from being burned. If you were to remove the hot dish with an unprotected

hand the pain you would suffer as your skin burned would subconsciously be associated with the dish itself: the dish is painful. However ontologically we can understand that the dish itself is simply hot and the body's reaction to the heat is to suffer pain. Therefore, the interaction between the two things (hand and dish) has 'created' or precipitated pain to be felt, but we can ask ourselves: is the pain real? Can it be objectively measured? If it is just our body trying to send a message to our conscious brain that lifting the hot dish with unprotected hands is a bad idea, then surely we can override this message and lift the dish anyway? Pain is possibly the most visceral sensation we experience as human beings but the important word to remember here, as with Husserl's work on phenomenology, is *experience*. The theoretical reality of pain, as simply a sensory message to our brains to protect us from harm, versus our experiential reality of pain, as something that is unpleasant and negative, presents the different ways in which ontology can be considered. Despite knowing that viruses don't *intend* to cause their hosts any pain, don't we sometimes feel a grudge against the natural world when we get ill? Can suffering even exist without being experienced?

As shown by the Methods Map, ontological assumptions can be broadly divided into two fundamental configurations: objective and subjective. Although these terms are far more commonly used, it may be helpful to develop clear distinctions relating to their use in the context of research. An **objective** perspective might be thought of as looking at reality as made up of solid **objects** that can be measured and tested, and which exist even when we are not directly perceiving or experiencing them. In particular, an objective perspective would allow that something as simple as measuring your height would result in the same answer, regardless of who does the measuring. In more complex settings, we might aspire that our objectivity allows us to make the judgements necessary to decide upon the guilt of a defendant in a court of law. In contrast, a **subjective** perspective looks at reality as made up of the perceptions and interactions of living **subjects**. For instance, our response to a particular piece of music varies such that we might find something delightful whilst our friends find the same piece entirely unlistenable.

Having established these basic definitions, we can return to the process of researching organizational settings. For instance, take the claim that happier workers are more productive. We might hold the belief that the lives of others continue independently of our perceptions, and so we can measure

and test their actions and reactions whilst maintaining our role as detached observers. This belief, typical of enquiries into the physical sciences, would be described as an **objective** ontology. An objective ontology thus assumes that reality exists independently of our comprehension of it, and that it is possible to establish and explain universal principles and facts through robust, replicable methods. At this point, you may find yourself agreeing that this seems rather obvious and sensible. Alternatively, you may feel a sense of discomfort at what you perceive to be an oversimplification of the myriad factors that might influence happiness, productivity, motivation, duty or fear, each of which may be influencing how productive an individual worker is in a given circumstance on a given day.

In contrast to an objective stance, a **subjective** ontology assumes that our perceptions are what shape reality, and this is a belief expressed in large sections (though not all) of the social sciences. A subjective ontology sees facts as culturally and historically located, and therefore subject to the variable behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and interpretations – what we call the subjectivity – of both the observer and the observed. This is sometimes known as a relativist ontology, although this is arguably misleading, as one can appreciate the power of subjectivity without necessarily being a moral or cultural relativist. Subjective ontology approaches reality as multiple in the sense that each individual experiences their place and time in the world in a different way. For example, the subjectivity of an African-American woman in 1960s Mississippi is likely to be entirely different from that of a Native American Indian male in the same time and place (although both are likely to have their experiences shaped by severe oppression). You may already notice a problem with the subjective approach, namely that it seems to require a certain objectivity to make a universal claim for a subjective ontology. This is not a problem that we shall attempt to solve here. A simpler criticism of an entirely subjective ontology would be to say that there *are* things in the world with observable characteristics, without which they would be something else. For instance, zinc, or ethanol. A subjective approach might counter this by saying that these characteristics are only observable relative to a particular vocabulary, set of assumptions, and people who subscribe to them; that scientific knowledge is widely accepted as true does not mean that it is universally accepted.

Questions of objective and subjective ontologies continue to fuel philosophical debate, perhaps because they are largely irresolvable. Our

perceptions of ourselves and of others *are* mutually influential. Like it or not, when interacting with other people we are constantly making subconscious comparisons and judgements, to ascertain our position within that interaction. We may change the way in which we act if we know that we are investigating something, or indeed our actions are being investigated. At the same time, it seems there *is* an observable reality that exists outside of human interactions, the properties of which can be measured and predicted. As such, it should be understood that objective and subjective ontologies are not mutually exclusive, and many researchers delineate their positions in relation to these poles, somewhere between the two.

If this leaves you uncertain as to which way of studying reality is the most appropriate for your research, then take some comfort from the fact that this is a healthy sign that you are engaging with an exploration of the underlying philosophy of your research. At the beginning of any project (and often towards the end!) this uncertainty is entirely warranted, and very much desirable. Ontological questions require careful and continuous answering, and there will always be a valid argument against any position you select. The one certainty is that considerations of how the researcher and the act of researching might unwittingly impact upon that being researched must be expressed, in order for the study to demonstrate an appropriate depth of investigation. In academic research (particularly within the social sciences) asserting our ontological position is crucial, since this sets out the basis on which we view reality. All that we can really hope for is a general consensus within the parameters deemed acceptable by a given community, and it is therefore important to recognise that the somewhat manufactured and exaggerated opposition between objective and subjective ontologies acts as a catalyst for critical thinking.

Following the Methods Map from our considerations of ontology, we now encounter and must make decisions about our epistemology.

Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the way in which we obtain valid knowledge. The Methods Map illustrates four epistemological positions: positivist, critical realist, action research, and interpretivist. Although there are others, articulating your epistemological position in relation to these four allows you to define your own ideas about the way in which we decide what constitutes

reliable knowledge. For instance, if you are asked for the time, and guess it correctly without a watch, is this reliable knowledge? Or should this guess be verified somehow? Would hearing a time announcement on the radio represent confirmation, or would you be unsettled to know that digital transmission of radio signals introduces a small delay? The importance placed on the verified accuracy of the time would depend upon the context in which you need confirmation, e.g. you may want to catch a connecting flight, announce the turning of a new calendar year on live television or you may want to measure the heartbeat of a newborn baby.

The term epistemology can be deconstructed in a similar way to ontology. '*Episteme*' means knowledge and therefore, epistemology is the study of knowledge. By being clear about the way in which we might obtain valid knowledge we are in turn being clear about the nature of any knowledge claim that we might make. For instance, the observation that happier workers tend to be more productive is a form of knowledge claim. In everyday life we might engage in a debate as to the validity of such a claim, citing other factors that might influence happiness, productivity, or the relationship between the two. However, as researchers, we are required to draw connections between the assumptions we hold about reality (ontology) and the ways in which we might develop valid knowledge (epistemology).

Again referring to the Methods Map we can see a 'positivist' epistemology on one side, opposed to an 'interpretivist' epistemology on the other. These are placed in similar opposition to objective and subjective ontologies, as representing two different ways of thinking about knowledge. As implied by the vertical flow of the Map, an objective ontology is typically aligned with what is called a positivist (sometimes 'foundationalist') epistemological approach to knowledge, while subjectivity tends to be driven by an interpretivist (sometimes 'constructivist', although there are differences) epistemology. Again, these are specialist terms that can seem difficult to grasp, but a useful shorthand is to think of **positivists positing** and explaining principles, and **interpretivists interpreting** and understanding relationships. As we progress, it will become clear that a research study expressing an objective ontology with a positivist epistemological approach might naturally be aligned with a quantitative methodology, whilst a study expressing a subjective ontology with an interpretivist approach tends to be aligned with a qualitative methodology.

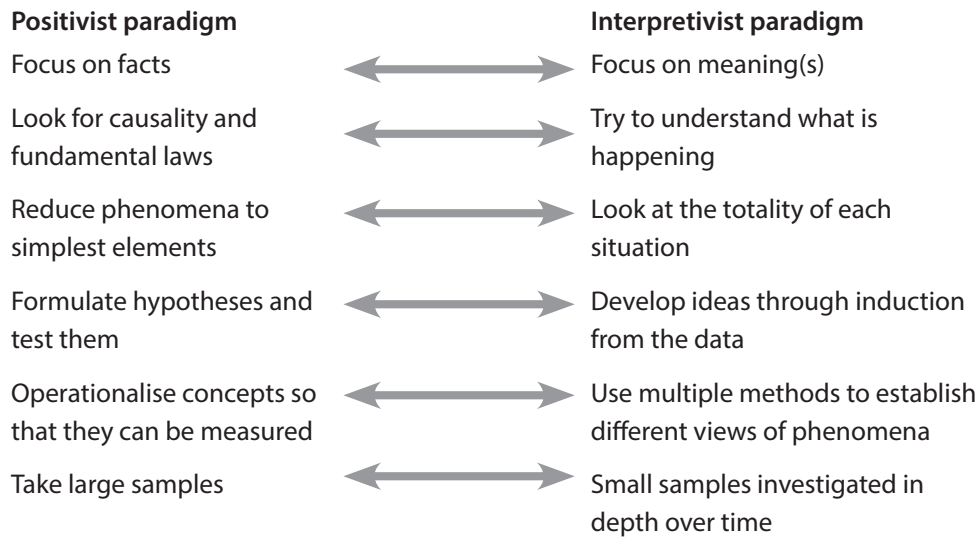


Figure 4.2: Epistemologies with Positive and Interpretivist influence

There now follows a presentation of four different epistemologies in social science research: *Positivism*, *Critical Realism*, *Action Research* and *Interpretivism*. There are many others being applied within social sciences research, however, particularly when it comes to undergraduate and post-graduate research, a solid understanding of these epistemologies is necessary to make an informed decision about the approach you will take.

■ Positivism

Positivism is most commonly associated with the natural sciences, but there are advocates who suggest that social science would benefit from adopting the same basic assumptions (see Donaldson, 1996). Three assertions are associated with positivism:

- Methodological procedures of natural science may be directly adapted to the study of human social actions;
- The outcomes of research in the social sciences will take the form of causal laws; and
- The results of social research are value-free.

Comte (1830/1853) first used the term positivism; he had envisaged that sociology was to be the apex of positivism. This view is summarised in Giddens (1974, p. 1) as “the science of man completed the historical evolution of the

hierarchy of the scientific disciplines, and for the first time made possible an adequate understanding of that evolution". Durkheim (1895/1964) was to defend Comte's (1830/1853) traditional version of positivism, which accentuated the supremacy of logic and scientific knowledge as the paradigm of all valid knowledge; the solution to the major practical problems facing mankind. Durkheim (1895/1964) understood sociology to be the objective study of 'social facts'; and that social facts were to be considered as things. However positivism was used in a derogatory sense by the Frankfurt School (typical examples can be seen in Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1988), Marcuse (1967), Adorno (1969)), in the 1960s, to describe the assertions of Popper (1957) that science offers the best method in the pursuit of objective knowledge. Popper (1957) describes the scientific method as the "method of bold conjectures (hypotheses) and ingenious and severe attempts to refute them (falsification)" (cited in Checkland 1999, p. 57). Popper (1957) argues that sociologists must adopt the procedural rules, standards and intellectual conventions of science and embrace the point that there are no such things as 'truth' other than conjectural, relative truth.

The popularity of positivism in business research is probably because the data used is highly specific and precise. Babbie (1998) argues the place for positivism in social research and points out the interacting links between positivism and phenomenology by noting that "every observation is qualitative at the outset" (Babbie, 1998, p. 36), whilst observing the reason "qualitative data seem richer in meaning is partly a function of ambiguity" (Babbie, 1998, p. 37). In social science, unlike physical sciences, paradigms cannot be true or false, as ways of looking; they can only be more or less useful.

■ Critical realism

Critical realism is a relatively recently articulated epistemological position, derived from both objective and subjective ontologies, and chiefly espoused by Roy Bhaskar (1978; 1989; 1993). Critical realists assume that there *is* a reality that exists independently of human perceptions, but that our access to this reality is always limited and skewed *by* those perceptions. Our perceptions are both physically limited (e.g. we can't see into the past or future) and ideologically limited (e.g. we are biased by personal experiences). Although the critical realist makes assumptions about the world in order to produce knowledge from observations grounded in reality, it is

accepted that these assumptions only create a temporary reality, which may well take on a different appearance from another perspective. Put simply, this position is 'realist' in believing in an external reality, but 'critical' of our ability to access and measure it.

Building on this, critical realists hold that although it is not possible to objectively verify universal characteristics of reality, humans nevertheless behave as if this were possible. We interpret and act upon situations as though causal relationships (e.g. **if** I drop this **then** it will fall) exist independently of our perceptions and actions. This view assumes that the power of perceptions can and does shape the world, but at the same time sees the effect of that shaping as the construction of often reliable and measurable circumstances. For example, when I strike a match, I assume that the flame will not be so large as to engulf and ignite the rest of the box. Furthermore, even when performing the same action with the unshakeable belief that the striking of a single match *would* ignite the box, this wouldn't happen unless an unusual set of physical conditions were met to make it so. Our perceptions inform and guide our decision-making, yet many scientific theories have physical consequences independent of human experience.

This layering of reality is expressed by critical realists as **stratification**, which is a principal feature of this perspective, although there is arguably some ambiguity in the application of the term. Briefly, stratified reality consists of a hierarchy of overlapping layers, with lower (or deeper, invisible) levels causing effects at higher (more easily perceived) levels. We might consider this as the distinction between what we can see happening, the events leading up to this, and the various forces that may or may not come into play at a given moment. This uniquely structured interaction of layers produces a particular outcome that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts, but nevertheless can be observed at the higher levels of stratification.

This becomes more complicated when we start to think about social reality, such as the case of happy workers. Phenomena such as happiness are subject to similarly layered distinctions based on what we assume to be reality, and again tempered by our limited ability to perceive what is occurring. Critical realists are particularly interested in the differences and interactions between the individual and society, and between individual actions and social structures. Although this is not the space to fully explore the stratification of reality, nor the 'emergent' powers stemming from its layers, it might be helpful to consider the stratification of this small sec-

tion of the chapter. We (the author and imagined reader) acknowledge that there *is* something called ‘critical realism’ in the real world, but we can only gain access to this through language. We can read the words on these pages without having access to the process of writing, the chemical properties of ink, the historical chance and measurement that led to the printed word, or to the discussions that preceded the decision to write. The way in which we read these words is likely to be altered if, for instance, we have had an unfortunate prior experience with a spontaneously combusting box of matches. Such idiosyncratic elements of human experience and biography come together to create a perspective on critical realism that is completely individual, yet refers to something that certainly seems to exist.

Even if this all seems quite remarkably *unrealistic* in its apprehension of what we understand as reality, it is hoped that this brief summation of critical realism will both prompt further investigation and generate searching questions about the nature of one’s philosophical inquiries.

■ Action research

Far from being a single approach, Action Research is an umbrella term used to cover a wide range of styles of research unified by a shared emphasis on effecting change to the situation being studied. One of the most commonly used definitions of action research is that it involves working with organizational members on matters of genuine concern to them and over which they have a genuine need to take action (Eden and Huxham, 2001). It is therefore a highly applied and engaged form of research which sees managers and researchers collaborate to foster change.

Kurt Lewin introduced the term in 1946 to denote a new approach to social research that combined generation of theory with changing a social system through the researcher acting on or in the social system. He suggested that action research was concerned with two rather different questions “the study of general laws and the diagnosis of a specific situation” (Lewin, 1946: 36). Lewin’s early Action Research projects concerned critical social problems, like racism and anti-Semitism, since he believed traditional science was failing to make an adequate response to such problems. Sadly, Lewin only wrote 22 pages on the topic of Action Research (Peters and Robinson, 1984), and died suddenly in 1947, aged 57 years old. Nevertheless, Action Research evolved in two related but distinct traditions. In the US, with the help of Douglas McGregor, Lewin set up the Center for Group Dynamics at

MIT and then at the University of Michigan. Working with Lewin's guidance Cook, Chein and Harding outlined four varieties of action research – diagnostic, participant, empirical and experimental. (see Cunningham, 1993:15). In the UK, a group of war-time researchers who later formed the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, developed their own variant of Action Research using a steering committee to develop a strategy for carrying out the research and implementing the findings in a particular context. Researchers would gather background data, perform analysis and implement changes, often in the first instance using a test area of the organization.

Today there are a number of variants of Action Research in use (see Reason and Bradbury, 2001 for a comprehensive overview). Some approaches to Action Research use “survey feedback” where systematic feedback of data from, for example, a company-wide employee attitude survey would be used to bring about change through group discussion and involvement. However, Action Research is more commonly associated with qualitative data. Indeed, MacIntosh and Bonnet (2007 p. 321) note:

“Qualitative research is sometimes styled as the poor cousin of ‘real science’... if this is the case, action research is the poor cousin’s downtrodden neighbour”.

The validity of Action Research is often challenged precisely because it places heavy emphasis on developing a deep understanding of one specific setting, thus critics claim it has a limited capacity to develop generalizable knowledge. Despite its popularity as a method, only a handful of empirical publications in the most prestigious journals feature Action Research in their method statements. Researchers considering Action Research therefore face two challenges. First, they must find a host organization willing to (a) participate in the research and (b) committed to taking action on the basis of the research conducted. Second, they may face greater difficulty in publishing their findings in mainstream peer-reviewed journals.

■ Interpretivism

Interpretivism is often considered the generic paradigm of the social sciences and was developed in reaction to the dominance of positivism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Interpretivism identifies that there are fundamental differences between the natural and human sciences and these distinctions stemmed from the different aims – explanation versus understanding.

Weber (1924), a key proponent of this paradigm, argued that the social sciences seek to ‘understand’ social phenomena in terms of ‘meaningful’ categories of human experience and therefore, the ‘causal-functional’ approach of the natural sciences is not applicable in social inquiry. Weber (1924) recognised the nature of ‘subjectivity’ in studying humans, and noted that whilst physical systems cannot react to predictions made about them, social systems can. He pointed out that the ‘self-consciousness’ of human beings and the ‘freedom of choice’, which that consciousness entails, implies that an observer can never obtain an up-to-date account of the subject’s state of mind, which would be correct for the agent to accept. Hence in the interpretivist tradition, the social scientist can only reveal ‘trends’ rather than ‘laws’.

Weber’s interpretive social science, based on the ‘attribution of meaning’, is closely related to Husserl’s (1950/1964) work on phenomenology. The basic premise of the interpretivist paradigm is that unlike the physical sciences, which deal with objects external to the researcher, the social sciences deal with action and behaviour generated from within the human mind. There is a clear interrelationship between investigators and the investigated, researcher and the researched. Verification of what actually exists in the social and human world depends on the researcher’s interpretation; the researchers’ beliefs regarding the metaphysical realm could influence their interpretation of the physical realm.

In essence, the interpretive paradigm takes into account the multiple realities which are inevitably revealed by the perspectives of different individual(s), the context of the phenomenon under investigation, the contextual understanding and interpretation of the collected data and the nature and depth of the researcher’s involvement. Broadly speaking, *interpretivism* allows the focus to be fixed on *understanding* what is happening in a given context rather than just *measuring* it (Patton, 1990; Klein & Myers, 1999).

A note on (research) paradigms

St Anselm, the 11th century philosopher and Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote, “I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand” (Anselm *Proslogion* 154-5). St Anselm asserts that nothing is achieved or ascertained by merely speculating from the sidelines; a certain level of committed involvement is necessary. Indeed, different research vantage points would yield different types of understanding, whilst

accentuating these diverse perspectives does not negate the existence of an external reality. Hammersley (1992) referred to 'subtle realism'; the acceptance that the social world does exist independently of individual subjective understanding, although highlighting that the social world is regulated by normative expectations and shared understandings. The theory of the independent existence of the social world was established by Aristotle (circa 350BC) when he argued that something exists apart from the concrete thing:

"If, on the one hand, there is nothing apart from individual beings, and the individuals are infinite in number, how is it possible to get knowledge of the infinite individuals? For all things that we know, we know in so far as they have some unity and identity, and in so far as some attribute belongs to them universally. But if this is necessary, and there must be something apart from the individuals, it will be necessary that something exists apart from the concrete thing" (Aristotle Metaphysics 999a 25 – 28).

At the ontological level, the scientific method has been questioned with observations that there are many more social processes at play than are usually acknowledged in the development of new scientific 'facts' (Latour and Woolgar, 1986). Also, developments in chaos theory and quantum physics have led to an increasing number of studies questioning whether the natural world is as stable and law-like as had been previously supposed (see for example Prigogine and Stengers, 1984). Businesses, events, organisations, and even individuals do not, in themselves, possess meaning; meaning is conferred on them by and via interaction. Interpretivism seeks to observe the general trends and perceptions of a social phenomenon. Fundamentally, qualitative methods are useful for unravelling and understanding what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known. Management is a practice rather than a science and even proponents of the unity of science (such as Popper (1957) who assumes that facts can be gathered in the social sciences in much the same way as in natural sciences) have unfortunately devoted little attention to the particular problems of social science.

Recognition also needs to be given to the importance of being as objective and neutral as possible in the interpretation and presentation of the research. Current thinking would consider it essential for a research project to be framed within one philosophical paradigm, and to remain within it: the philosophical paradigm and the basic research assumptions must be compatible and clearly understood. Whilst mixed methods are increasingly popular, we would contend that mixed philosophies are likely to be a recipe

for confusion. In summary, the research assumptions which relate to the philosophical paradigm are:

- Ontological issue (nature of reality);
- Epistemological issue (relationship of the researcher to that being researched);
- Rhetorical issue (language selection in research); and
- Axiological issue (role of values in a study).

We shall now turn to the effective use of language, before considering the role of values in your research.

Rhetoric or the use of language in a dissertation

Rhetoric is the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively, and within the context of the research process it normally applies to the particular style of speaking or writing, especially the language of a particular subject. This section briefly explores two aspects of rhetoric which are central to the dissertation and underpinned by your research philosophy: metadiscourse and authorial voice. You are more familiar with this subject than you think. For a start we all use rhetoric every day to serve our agendas in conversation with friends and family, at university or at work. A *rhetorical question* is a question used in a context where the question in itself drives a particular agenda without needing answered, for example if someone asked you if you liked ice cream, your likely response would be *yes* but instead of simply saying yes, you might choose to drive a persuasive rhetorical agenda by responding with the rhetorical question, “Do fish live in water!?!”. By responding in the form of a rhetorical question you are enforcing the idea that someone shouldn’t have to ask if you like ice cream because *everyone* likes ice cream.

Metadiscourse is a term for words used by an author to mark the direction and purpose of a text. It refers to all those devices which you use to organise the text for the reader and can include textual as well as interpersonal functions. It includes use of language, first person pronouns, and evaluative expressions. When you are writing your dissertation you should consider the reader looking over your shoulder. You write to meet the reader’s needs at the time, and you must always consider your hypothetical reader when writing. In the case of this book the reader is multifaceted: students who are

taught by the authors and other students; colleagues who also engage their own students; the wider academic community who have an interest in the subject; and there is always the possibility of other readers looking at the content as an example of how to write a text book. In writing a dissertation you must address your reader who is probably your marker too, whilst proving you are making a contribution and demonstrating yourself as a competent member of the academic discipline.

How you use aspects of metadiscourse will also help shape your authorial voice – the way in which you write to differentiate yourself from other authors. This does not mean that as an author you have to write the same way all the time, just as different social occasions require different dress codes, different texts require different writing styles. A reflective essay would require a strong personal voice whereas a report or an exam would require a more formal tone. This view of authorial voice also has close parallels with a major tenet of post-structuralist thought. According to Foucault (1981) people have, by their very nature, multiple instead of unitary personalities or subjectivities. The Russian literary and linguistics scholar Bakhtin (1986) proposed the notion of *heteroglossia*, (from the Greek meaning many tongues). All language is made up of words, phrases, and ideas in effect borrowed from other authors and infused with their intentions; an author's voice is inevitably multiple, intertextual, and appropriate to the situation. Most academic writers develop an autobiographical self, the identity they bring with them to their writing.

The underpinning philosophy that informs the research design that you adopt for your study will shape how you write your dissertation. If you adopt an interpretivist stance then you might be more inclined to write in a personal voice, using personal pronouns (if considered appropriate by your supervisor) and the tone could highlight the evolving decision making which took place during the research process. Whereas if you were positivist in your approach, your writing might more naturally take a more formal tone, based on set definitions and with a rather impersonal voice. As has been implicitly mentioned in this chapter, language itself is a construction that we use to communicate our work and our ideas. Within the area you are studying there will be prevailing assumptions relating to the meaning of words and phrases and their appropriate uses. With the same precision that you would seek to spell and arrange words appropriately, you must endeavour to be aware of the *meaning* of the language you use to the par-

ticular literature space to which your dissertation will belong. For example, you may intend to interview for your dissertation business owners who could legitimately be described interchangeably as *entrepreneurs, leaders and managers*. However, each of these three terms has a vast area of literature that inform their meanings, and thus by using all three your metadiscourse would be weakened, thereby jeopardising the strength and validity of your conclusions. Your writing style and language choices will influence your marker, and should be appropriate to your academic community. Finally, and most importantly, it should be readable. This might seem like an obvious thing to say but how often have we read academic papers that are full of incomprehensible words and groaning under a writing style so impenetrable that the text is rendered unreadable. Writing should use language that is accessible to as many people as possible.

Axiological considerations

Axiology is the philosophical study of value, often seen as the collective term for ethics and aesthetics; the two branches of philosophy that depend on notions of value. This is distinct from Research Ethics which should inform your data collection. Values here inform the bias, which you as an individual bring to the research project. We all have biases; it is how we deal with them or at the very least acknowledge them that is important.

One of the defining features of contemporary industrial society is post-modernity and the development of reflexivity or self-consciousness. Simply put, reflexivity is that stage beyond reflection: reflecting back on oneself. Reflexive modernity or postmodernity, and the vagaries of the post-modern condition are virtually unavoidable in contemporary research within the social sciences, which include business management. Personal subjective experiences are often central to the choice of research path, and should not go unacknowledged.

In social science research we deal with human interaction and feelings, not the cold hard facts normally studied in the natural sciences and engineering. This can present individuals in sensitive and demanding situations, such as the complex dynamics studied in Alexander et al. (2012), where the subjective interpretation of the concept of bullying is dealt with among organisational teams. In his address to the universities, Pope John Paul II (2000, p.3) states that it is the duty of academics and researchers to make

“universities ‘cultural laboratories’ in which theology, philosophy, human sciences and natural sciences may engage in constructive dialogue” and observes that in universities “there is an increased tendency to reduce the horizon of knowledge to what can be measured and to ignore any question touching on the ultimate meaning of reality.”

In the research process a positivist axiological approach would be a value-free and unbiased process, whereas interpretivism could be more value-laden and biased. That said we might also keep in mind the words of Benedict XVI (2005, p.2) when he observes that today “we are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” Now, it seems likely that Benedict had his own bias when he said that, after all he was a Cardinal at the time, and he made that speech to the other Cardinals the day before he was elected Pope. Most texts are value-laden and have inherent bias.

Assumption	Question	Positivism	Critical Realism	Action Research	Interpretivist
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is singular, set apart from the researcher	Reality is stratified and engaged with by the researcher	Reality is knowable through interaction with the specifics of a given situation	Reality is multiple and interpreted by the researcher
Epistemo-logical	How do we obtain knowledge of that reality?	Researcher is independent from that being researched	Interdependent but analytically distinct nature of society, culture (structure) and individual (agency)	Researcher interacts with what is being researched with the express intention of changing the situation	Researcher interacts with that being researched
Rhetorical	How is language used in the research?	Formal based on set definitions; impersonal voice	Formal as well as considers first and third person voice	Tends toward the first person voice	Informal evolving decisions; personal voice
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Value-free and unbiased	Considers the influence of values as experience	The values of the researcher are imposed through the overt attempt to effect a particular kind of change	Value-laden and biased

Figure 4.3: Research assumptions and positivistic and interpretivist paradigms. Adapted from O’Gorman (2008)

Once you have formed your research paradigm, a further set of choices can be made relating to the approach that you take to gathering your data. As illustrated by the Methods Map, this involves the selection of a general methodology, and specific techniques. Chapter 5 looks at case studies, and Chapter 6 explores different sources of data. Chapter 7 offers a discussion of qualitative data gathering techniques, while Chapter 8 looks at quantitative data gathering techniques. Again, following the Map, you will then come to select an appropriate approach to data analysis. These approaches are broadly categorised as deductive, which typically works to analyse quantitative data, and inductive, which tends to be used to analyse qualitative data. Chapters 8 and 10 provide the accompanying discussions on analysing qualitative and quantitative data respectively.

Only since the era of the Enlightenment, and the rise of rationalism – with its rigid view of a nature governed by intractable rules – has the written word been straitjacketed by very clear ideas of just what is and is not physically possible. Imagination and a refusal to take things at face value play a big part in scientific understanding, research and discovery. For instance the King James Bible, first published in 1611, refers several times to the unicorn, while dragons were often hunted in the Dark Ages. The ability to take an imaginative leap beyond accepted scientific dogma and the entrenched views of academic colleagues, disciplinary boundaries or even apparent common sense has been at the heart of a significant number of scientific or technological advances in the last few hundred years. For example, throughout most of the 20th century, the conventional wisdom was that peptic ulcers were caused by gastric juice. Only by a pioneering doctor infecting himself with a bacterium (*Helicobacter pylori*) could he prove that conventional wisdom was incorrect and win the Nobel Prize for medicine. This is true even for advances that seem to be based on objective fact or cold hard logic, as the physicist Max Planck said: “New ideas are not generated by deduction, but by an artistically creative imagination ... Science, like the humanities, like literature, is an affair of the imagination” (McFague 1982, p.75). After all, as Shakespeare’s Hamlet tells Horatio “There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Hamlet Act 1 Scene v).

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