

Chapter 5

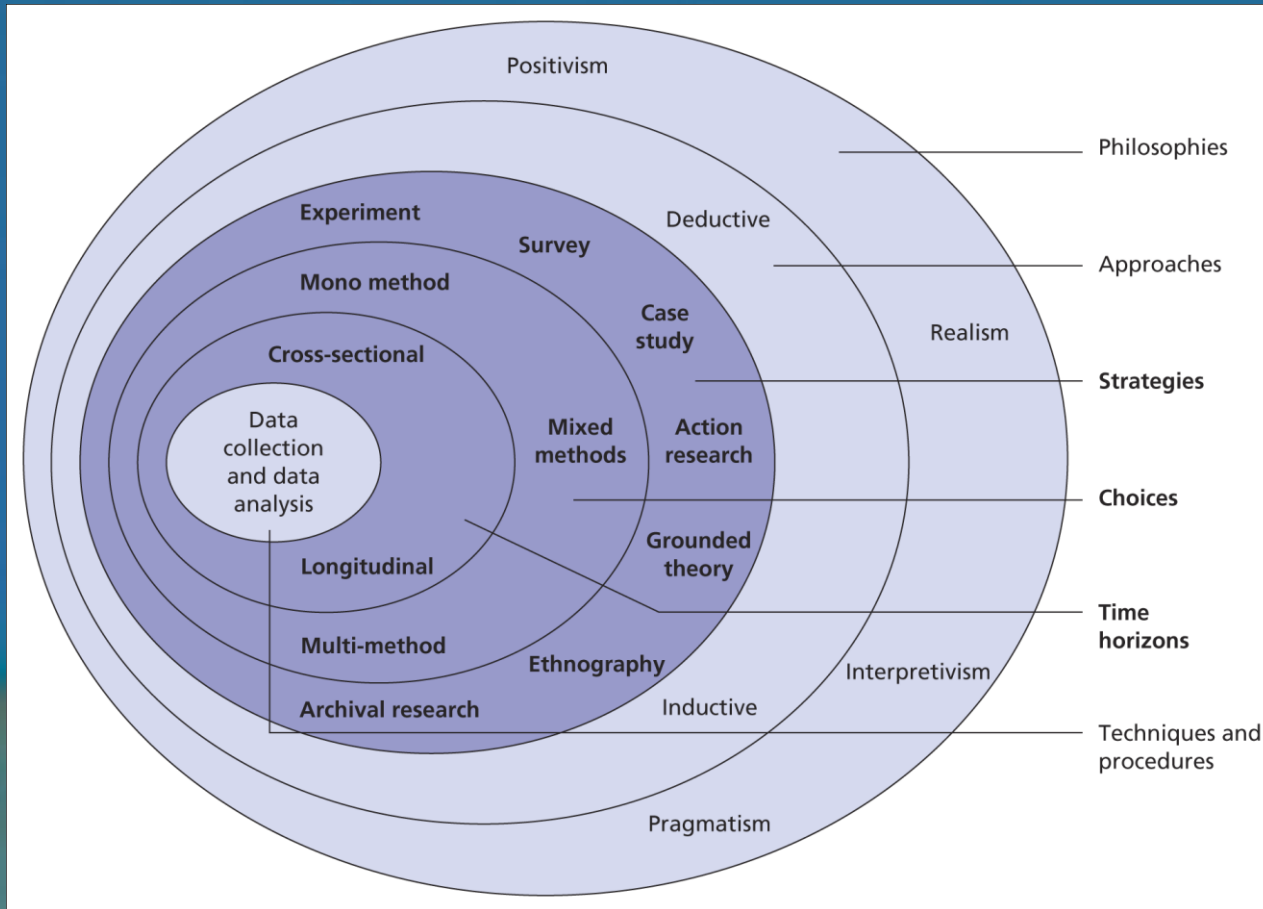
Formulating the research design

The Process of Research Design

- Research choices
- Research strategies
- Time horizons

Research Design and Tactics

The research onion



Saunders *et al*, (2009)

Figure 5.1 The research 'onion'

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'. It is particularly 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. For example, that a cursory analysis of quantitative data on manufacturing scrap rates shows a relationship between scrap rates and the age of machine being operated

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

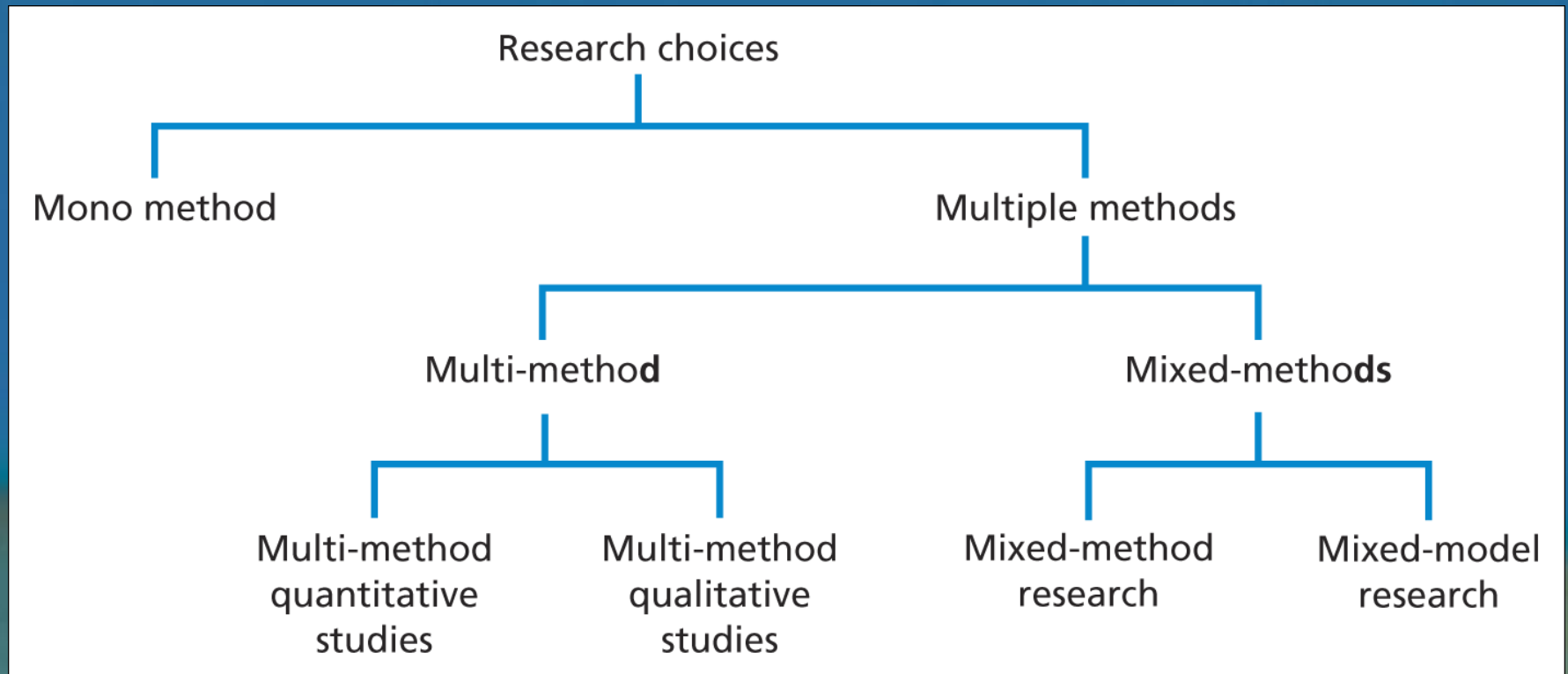
The role of the practitioner-researcher

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)

Figure 5.4 Research choices

Multiple research methods

Reasons for using mixed method designs: (Table 5.1)

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

Source: developed from Bryman (2006)

Time Horizons

Select the appropriate time horizon

- Cross-sectional studies
- Longitudinal studies

Credibility of research findings

Important considerations

- Reliability
- Validity
- Generalisability
- Logic leaps and false assumptions

Research design ethics

Remember

‘The research design should not subject the research population to embarrassment, harm or other material disadvantage’

Adapted from Saunders *et al*, (2009)

Summary: Chapter 5

Research design turns a research question and objectives into a project that considers

Strategies

Choices

Time horizons

Research projects can be categorised as

Exploratory

Descriptive

Explanatory

Research projects may be

Cross-sectional

Longitudinal

Summary: Chapter 5

Important considerations

- The main research strategies may combined in the same project
- The opportunities provided by using multiple methods
- The validity and reliability of results
- Access and ethical considerations