

Fundamental Concepts in Management Research and Ensuring Research Quality

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to develop an appreciation of the wide range of methodological choices available to management researchers, including an overview of their approaches to data collection, principles of data analysis and theory building. This study will expand on issues and debates common to many of the approaches and will conclude with demonstrating the ability to explain a chosen research approach. This paper has a significant contribution by clarifying how to ensure research quality, which is crucial to pursue auditable data collection and analysis and consequently to generate reliable knowledge in particular to case study research.

Introduction

Research methodology has a central role in any kind of management research if the research aims to demonstrate credibility. A lack of consideration of the philosophical nature of the research might seriously affect the quality of the outcome of the research. The way the researchers understand and interpret the reality of the world will influence the research process followed and in consequence the results and findings. Hence, the philosophical assumptions will help the researcher to choose the right research strategies and techniques. These are some benefits of understanding various research approaches highlighted [1].

Design process of the research is clearer.

- Understanding the characteristics of the different philosophical paradigms may help the researcher to foresee which research design may work and which may not.
- It may help the researcher to identify and create research designs that might be unknown for him/her.
- Helps the researcher to develop a research identity.

This paper focuses on case study research because since 1990s, it is becoming highly popular to conduct management and business research in specific contexts and in particular situations [2].

ONTOLOGY

Ontology is related to the nature of truth in world. This can be subjective or objective and thus explained as assumptions that we make the nature of reality. Science and social science debates around ontology have been different from each other. Social science does not follow a traditional approach and therefore richer in philosophical debates [3]. Main ontologies are :

- **Objective ontology** (physical sciences approach; deals with facts, causality, fundamental laws, reductionism, measurement and objective reality; the truth holds regardless

of who the observer is; aim is to discover what is there)

- **Subjective ontology** (constructed; the nature of what is there is not solid but shifting; truth depends on who establishes it and facts are all human creations; aim is to understand people's interpretations and perceptions)

EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology is related to the way we see the nature of reality in world. We look at social world issues from different lenses we gained through our background, education, personal and professional experiences. Hence, it is a general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world [1]. Four key epistemologies in social sciences considered in this study are:

- Positivism
- Critical realism / Relativism
- Interpretivism / Social Constructionism / Phenomenological Approach
- Action Research

There are different philosophical debates amongst business and management researchers who favour different paradigms highlights two dimensions as key criteria for philosophical modelling of the management research [4]. The first is *rational/existential* dimension, which defines whether there is just one reality and independent to the researcher, or this reality is subjective and socially constructed. The following sections endeavour to describe distinguishing characteristics of each paradigm. It is worth to note here that epistemology and paradigm are used as interchangeable terms here. Paradigm represents a theoretical

framework, within which research is conducted [5].

METHODOLOGY

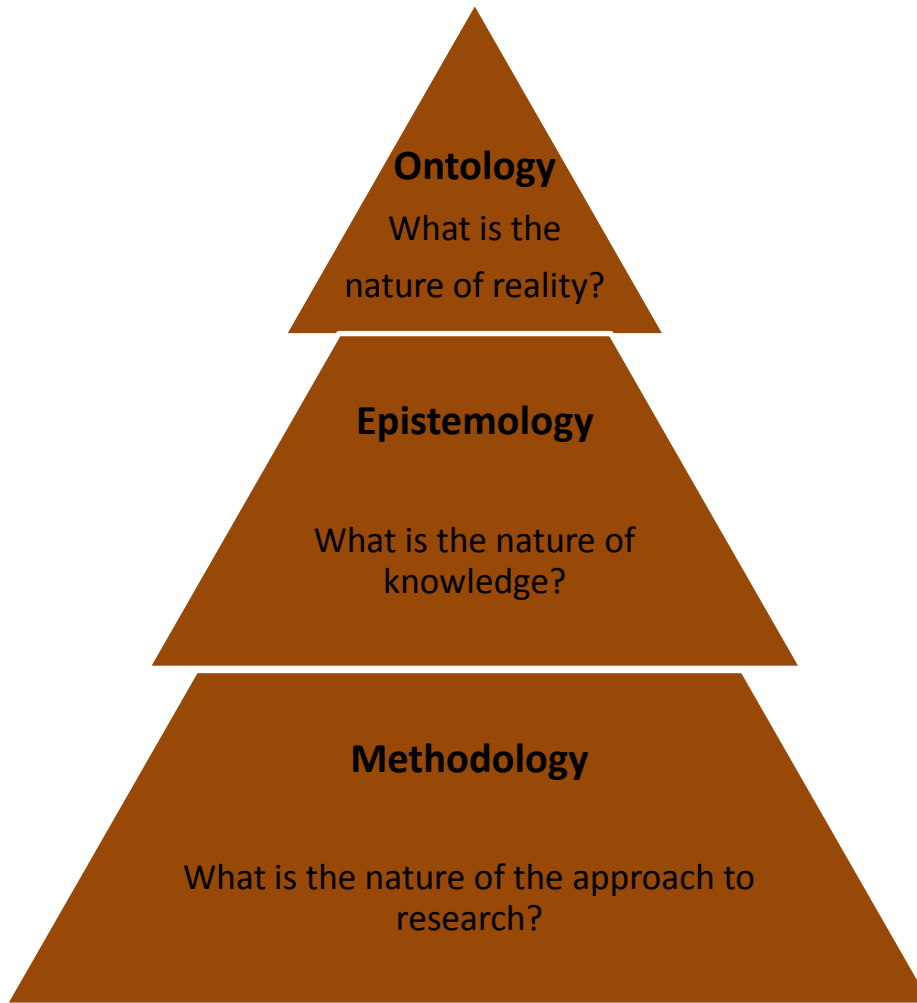
Methodology is a combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation [1]. Methodology is about which approach to take and consequently there are a number of alternatives such as hypothetico-deductive, inductive and co-operative inquiry. In short, Hypothetico-deductive methodology is applied within positivist paradigm generally and inductive methodology often starts with data rather than literature and finally co-operative inquiry is seen in action type of research in which there are high levels of involvement of the researcher.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Methods are individual techniques for data collection, analysis, etc.. [1]. When researchers decide to pursue a specific epistemology, they often adopt methods which are commonly used within that epistemology. Techniques and methods are about what practices of research should be undertaken and the approach the researcher takes will impact on what he or she can see and find. Some research methods and techniques are statistical testing, experimental, secondary data analysis, case study, observation, interviews and participation.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH DESIGN

To sum up, it is possible to draw a map of ways of scoping the research through choosing a epistemology, methodology and related methods and techniques as shown in Figure 2. These fundamental concepts in any management research design are critical to make a research academically credible.



Contribution to knowledge

One of the major expectations from a good quality of research is its contribution to knowledge in terms of novelty of research and the added value to what is known already in literature. This contribution could possibly in the following means (Beech, 2005):

- Confirmation of existing theories
- Extension of a theory into new areas
- New conjunctions between previously separate theories or disciplines
- Advances in methodology
- Developments in the application of techniques
- A proof
- Disproving a null-hypothesis
- Generation of hypothesis
- Generation of grounded theory
- Generations of insights

- Theoretical reflection on practice

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper is to clarify the concept of research methodology and its implications for management research. To this end, the characteristics of research philosophies and a generic research methodology were described. It is suggested that the content and the proposition of the research questions and the researchers preferences should be analysed in order to define the methodological requirements of a particular study. Furthermore, this paper clarified how to warrant the choice of the appropriate research methods, the philosophical research paradigms and their assumptions that surround a research by suggesting helpful tactics for research design choices and processes. Hopefully, the tactics

and techniques presented in this paper to choose the most conducive methodology will be of help for management researchers. Finally, this paper concludes asserting that research quality assessment is very important to ensure credible research findings and implications. Therefore case study type of research which is a powerful method in management research is chosen and expanded on regarding seven research quality criteria derived from literature.

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