Research Methods for Business Students

Chapter 4

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Learning points

- To outline the key assumptions of the positivist, interpretivist and realist research philosophies.
- To distinguish between two main approaches to research: deductive and inductive.
- To identify the main research strategies and explain why these should not be thought of as mutually exclusive.
- To explain the benefits of adopting a multi-method approach to the conduct of research.
- To explain the concepts of validity and reliability and identify the main threats to validity and reliability.
- To understand some of the main ethical issues implied by the choice of research strategy.
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- The research process “onion”
  - Research philosophy
  - Research approaches
  - Research strategies
  - Time horizons
  - Data collection methods

- See figure 4.1 in page 83
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- Research philosophy
  - Positivism
    - The stance of the natural scientist
  - Interpretivism
    - The role of the interpretivist to seek to understand the subjective reality of those that they study in order to make sense of and understand their motives, actions and intentions.
  - Realism
    - Based on the belief that a reality exists that is independent of human thoughts and beliefs.
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- Choosing a research approach
  - Deduction: testing theory
    - Deducing a hypothesis from theory.
    - Expressing the hypothesis in operational terms.
    - Testing this operational hypothesis.
    - Examining the specific outcome of the inquiry.
    - If necessary, modifying the theory in the light of the findings.
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- Choosing a research approach
  - Deduction: testing theory
    - Several important characteristics:
      - There is the search to explain causal relationships between variables.
      - Concepts need to be operationalised in a way that enables facts to be measured quantitatively.
      - Generalisation.
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- Choosing a research approach
  - Induction: building theory
    - It enables you to take a more informed decision about your research design.
    - It will help you to think about those research approaches that will work for you and, crucially, those that will not.
    - A knowledge of the different research traditions enables you to adapt your research design to cater for constraints.
4.1 Differing approaches to research

- Choosing a research approach
  - Major differences between deductive and inductive approaches to research
  - See box 4.1 in page 89.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- List:
  - Experiment
  - Survey
  - Case study
  - Grounded theory
  - Ethnography
  - Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies
  - Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- **Experiment**
  - Definition of a theoretical hypothesis
  - Selection of samples of individuals from known populations
  - Allocation of samples to different experimental conditions
  - Introduction of planned change on one or more of the variables
  - Measurement on a small number of the variables
  - Control of other variables
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- **Survey**
  - The survey strategy is usually associated with the deductive approach.
  - They allow the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way.
  - Using a survey strategy should give you more control over the research process.
  - The data collected by the survey strategy may not be as wide-ranging as those collected by other research strategies.
  - The questionnaire is not the only way to collect data.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Case study
  - A strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.
  - The data collection methods employed may be various. They may include questionnaires, interviews, observation, documentary analysis.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Grounded theory
  - Data collection starts without the formation of an initial theoretical framework. Theory is developed from data generated by a series of observations.
  - These data lead to the generation of predictions that are then tested in further observations which may confirm.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Ethnography
  - It emanates from the field of anthropology.
  - The purpose is to interpret the social world the research subjects inhabit in the way in which they interpret it.
  - Although not a dominant research strategy in business, ethnography may be very appropriate.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Action research
  - The strengths of an action research strategy are a focus upon change, the recognition that time needs to be devoted to reconnaissance, monitoring and evaluation and the involvement of employees throughout the process.
  - The action research spiral
    - See figure 4.2 in page 95.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- **Time horizons**
  - We should emphasize here that these time perspectives to research design are independent of which research strategy you are pursing.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Cross-sectional studies
  - It is probable that your research will be cross-sectional, the study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time.
  - We recognize that most research projects undertaken for academic courses are necessarily time constrained.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Longitudinal studies
  - The main strength of longitudinal research is the capacity that it has to study change and development.
  - Even with time constraints it is possible to introduce a longitudinal element to your research.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies
  - Exploratory:
    - A valuable means of finding out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light”.
    - Three principal ways
      - A search of the literature
      - Talking to experts in the subjects
      - Conducting focus group interviews
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies
  - Descriptive studies
    - It is necessary to have a clear picture of the phenomena on which you wish to collect data prior to the collection of the data.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies
  - Explanatory studies
    - The emphasis here is on studying a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationship between variables.
4.2 The need for a clear research strategy

- **Practitioner-researcher**
  - Advantages:
    - Familiarity
  - Disadvantages:
    - Ignorance
    - Status
    - Time
4.3 Using multi-methods

- There are two major advantages to employing multi-methods in the same study.
  - Different methods can be used for different purposes in a study.
  - It enables triangulation to take place.
4.4 The credibility of research findings

- Reliability
- Threats to reliability
  - Participant error
  - Participant bias
  - Observer error
  - Observer bias
4.4 The credibility of research findings

- **Validity**
  - Concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about.

- **Threats to validity**
  - History
  - Testing
  - Instrumentation
  - Mortality
  - Maturation
  - Ambiguity about casual direction
4.4 The credibility of research findings

- Generalisability
- Logic leaps and false assumptions
  - Identification of the research population
  - Data collection
  - Data interpretation
4.5 The ethics of research design

- Need to consider the extent to which you should collect data from a research population that is unaware of the fact they are the subject of research and so have not consented.
4.6 Summary

- Three main philosophical positions in relation to research: positivism, interpretivism and realism.
- Two main approaches to research are deductive & inductive.
- The main research strategies are experiment, survey, case study, grounded theory, ethnography and action research.
- Research projects may be cross-sectional or longitudinal.
- Using multi-methods to research with different purposes served and that triangulation of results is facilitated.
The End
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THANK YOU!

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