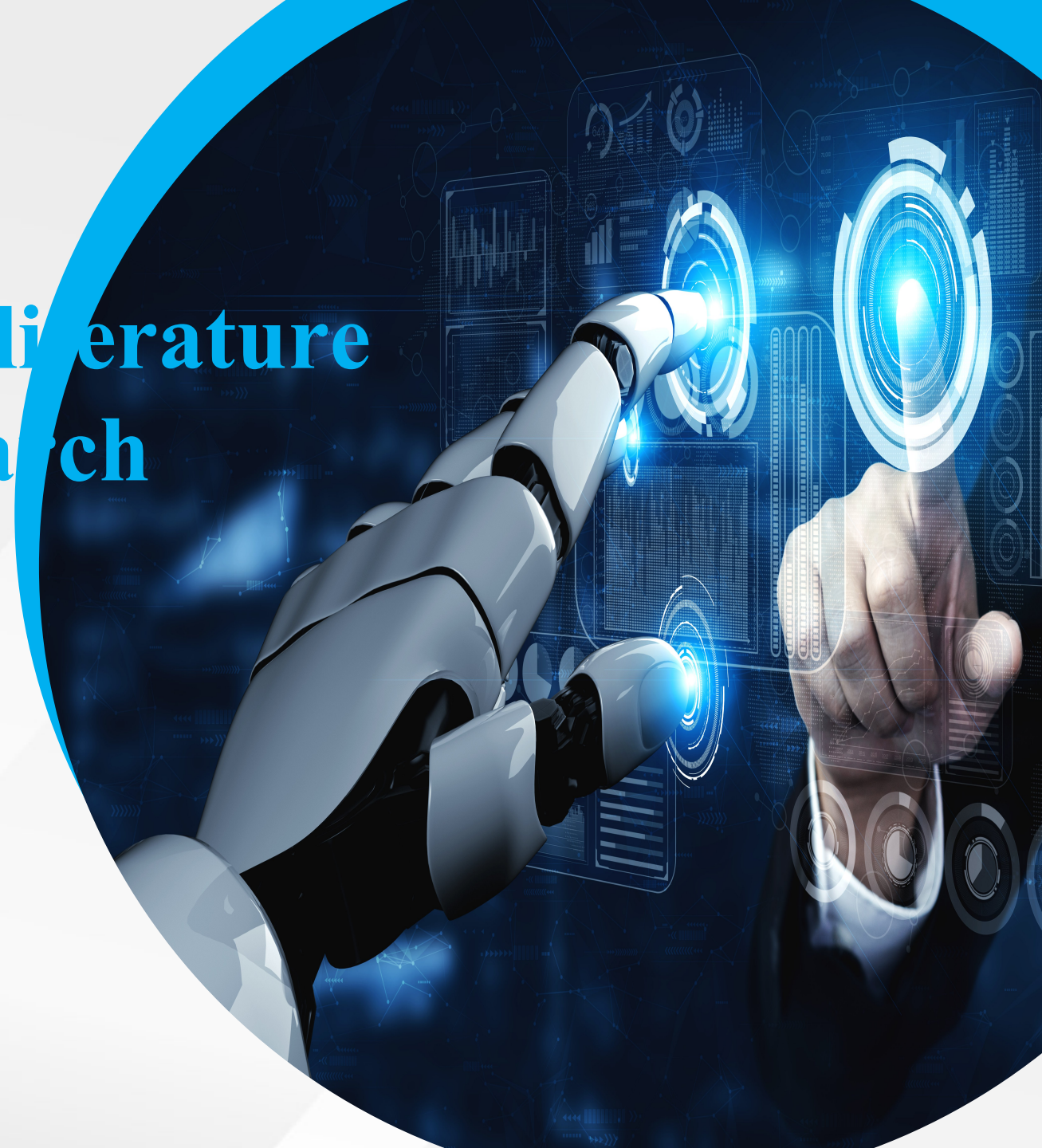


Critically reviewing the literature and understanding research philosophy

Prepared by Associate Professor.
Ahmed Rageh Ismail

ENT 636
Research Project

Lecture 3



Chapter
03

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should:

- understand what is meant by being critical when reviewing the literature, its purpose, the content and possible ways to structure it;
- be aware of types of literature available;
- define ontology, epistemology and axiology, and explain their relevance to entrepreneurship and innovation research;

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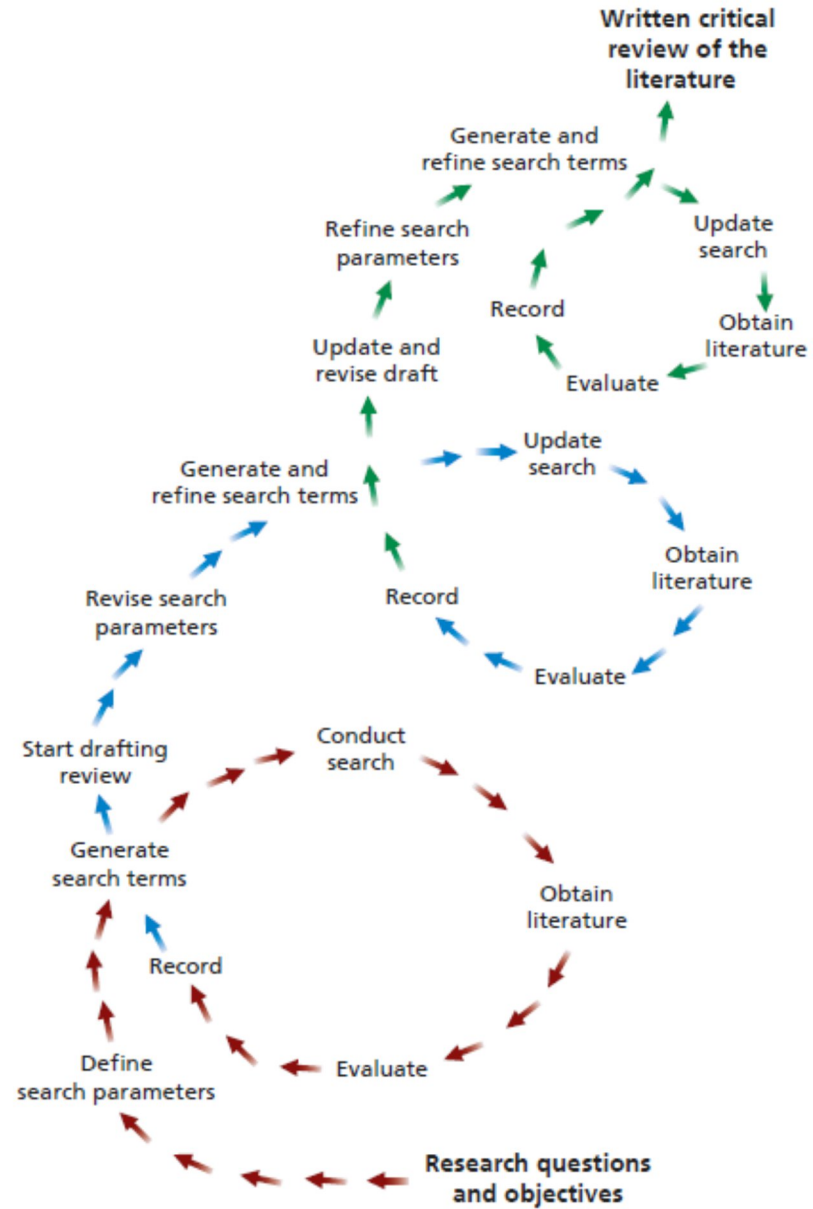
Learning outcomes

- understand the main research paradigms that are significant for entrepreneurship research;
- explain the relevance for business research of philosophical positions such as positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism;
- distinguish between deductive, inductive and abductive approaches to theory development.

**Chapter
03**

Introduction

For most research projects, the process of reviewing the literature and starting to draft your review will be an early activity. Despite this early start, it is usually necessary to continue refining your review throughout your project's life. The process can be likened to an upward spiral, culminating in the finished product, a written critical literature review of the literature.



Chapter
03**Introduction**

Unlike some academic disciplines, entrepreneurship research makes use of a wide range of literature. While your review is likely to include specific business disciplines such as accounting, finance, operations, strategy, marketing and human resource management, it is also likely to include other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education and many more.

Given this, and the importance of the review to your research, it is vital for you to be aware of what a critical literature review is and the range of literature available before you start the reviewing process. We therefore start this chapter by outlining what is meant by being critical, and the various purposes and forms a critical review of the literature can have

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Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review

Your critical literature review should be a constructively critical analysis that develops a clear argument about what the published literature indicates is known and not known about your research question (Wallace and Wray 2016).

This means that your literature review is not just a series of paragraphs, each describing and summarising a book or journal article. Rather, you will need to assess what is significant to your research and, on this basis, decide whether or not to include it.

If you think the concepts, theories, arguments or empirical research findings reported and discussed in an article are unclear, biased or inconsistent with other work and need to be researched further, you will need to justify why. This is not easy and requires careful thought.

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Being ‘critical’ and the purposes and forms of review

Being ‘critical’

There are four aspects of a critical approach that should be fostered by management education:

- critique of rhetoric;
- critique of tradition;
- critique of authority;
- critique of objectivity.

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Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review

The first of these, the 'critique of rhetoric', means appraising or evaluating a problem with effective use of language. In the context of your critical literature review, this emphasises the need for you, as the reviewer, to use your skills to make reasoned judgements and to argue effectively in writing.

The other three aspects also have implications for being critical when reading and writing about the work of others. This includes using other literature sources to question, where justification exists to do so, the conventional wisdom, the 'critique of tradition' and the dominant view portrayed in the literature you are reading, the 'critique of authority'.

Finally, it is likely also to include recognising in your review that the knowledge and information you are discussing are not value-free, the 'critique of objectivity'.

Chapter
03**Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review**

Being critical in reviewing the literature is, therefore, a combination of your skills and the attitude with which you read and your ability to write cogently. In critically reviewing the literature, you need to read the literature about your research topic with some scepticism and be willing to question what you read; the term critical referring to the judgement you exercise.

This means as you write your review you need to be constantly considering and justifying your own critical stance with clear arguments and references to the literature rather than just giving your own opinion. As you review the literature, your existing views and opinions are likely to be challenged by what you read. You should welcome these challenges and recognise

that through thinking critically about what you are reading, your views and opinions may alter

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Being ‘critical’ and the purposes and forms of review

Critically reviewing the literature for your research project, therefore, requires you to have gained topic-based background knowledge, understanding, the ability to reflect upon and to analyse the literature and, based on this, to make reasoned judgements that are argued effectively in writing.

Your written review provides a detailed and justified analysis of, and commentary on, the merits and faults of the key literature within your chosen area.

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Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review

Part of your critical judgement will involve you in identifying those theories and research findings that are most relevant to your research aims and objectives. This is not as easy as it seems and will invariably involve you in reading and evaluating literature that you subsequently judge is not relevant to your review.

For some research topics, as you begin to review the literature you will observe that a certain theory and set of ideas provide the theoretical base for much of the research reported. This theory is likely to be considered by researchers as seminal, in other words it has been of great importance or had great influence.

Chapter
03**Being ‘critical’ and the purposes and forms of review**

Seminal theories will often also be discussed in textbooks on your research area, the associated articles being frequently cited. At the same time, you will begin to recognise those researchers whose work is seminal and has been most influential in relation to your topic.

The work of these researchers’ is likely to be discussed more widely in journal articles and they may also be referred to by name in textbooks. These researchers are likely to be recognised as the experts in your research area.

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Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review

However, although others consider a particular theory seminal and recognise particular researchers as experts for your topic, this does not mean that you should ignore alternative theories and other researchers.

These will also need to be considered in relation to your own research in your critical review. For other research topics you will need to integrate a number of different theoretical strands to develop your understanding. You may through your reading discover that there are contrasting theoretical perspectives on the same topic, or it may be that your research needs to integrate two or more theories from different subject areas. This means you should:

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Being 'critical' and the purposes and forms of review

- refer to and assess research by those recognised as experts in your chosen area accurately;
- consider, discuss and evaluate research that offers both similar and differing perspectives on your chosen area;
- explain your evaluation regarding the value of this research, showing clearly how it relates to your research and acknowledging key work;
- justify your arguments clearly in a logical manner;
- distinguish clearly between research findings and researchers' opinions;
- ensure your references are completely accurate.



Box 3.1 Checklist

Evaluating whether your literature review is critical

- ✓ Have you contextualised your own research showing how your research question relates to previous research reviewed, acknowledging seminal work?
- ✓ Have you assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the previous research reviewed in relation to your research topic?
- ✓ Have you been rigorous in your discussion and assessment of previous research?
- ✓ Have you referred to research that is counter to, as well as supports, your views and opinions, having now reviewed the literature?
- ✓ Have you distinguished clearly between research findings and researcher's opinions?
- ✓ Have you made reasoned judgements about the value and relevance of others' research to your own?
- ✓ Have you justified clearly your own ideas?
- ✓ Have you highlighted those areas where new research (yours!) is needed to provide fresh insights and taken these into account in your arguments? In particular where:
 - there are inconsistencies in current knowledge and understanding
 - you have identified potential bias in previous research
 - there are omissions in published research
 - research findings need to be tested in alternative contexts
 - evidence is lacking, inconclusive, contradictory or limited.
- ✓ Have you justified your arguments by accurately referencing published research?

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Purpose of critical review

- the historical background to your research;
- an overview of your research's context by locating it in the associated contemporary debates, issues and questions provided by existing literature;
- resolution to conflicts amongst apparently contradictory previous research;
- a discussion of the relevant theories and concepts that underpin your research;
- definitions and clarifications regarding how relevant terms are being used in your research;
- insights into related research that your own work is designed to extend or challenge;
- supporting evidence that your research questions and aims are worth researching, in other words their significance.

Chapter
03**Purpose of critical review**

For some research projects researcher will use the literature to help him to identify theories and ideas that he/she will subsequently test with data. This is known as a deductive approach in which you use the literature to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework for subsequent testing.

For other research projects, the literature review, whilst outlining what is known, will reveal an aspect about which very little is known or for which there is no clear theoretical explanation. This can be likened to the literature revealing a black box within which the researcher do not know what is happening.

Chapter
03**Purpose of critical review**

In such instances, the literature review will provide the context and justification for finding out what is going on inside the black box. Researcher will then use data to explore what is going on inside the black box and from these insights develop a theory or conceptual framework.

This is known as an inductive approach and, although the research still has a clearly defined aim with research question(s) and objectives, researcher needs to first use data to either get a clearer feeling of what is going on, or better understand the nature of the problem in order to create a conceptual framework or develop a theory.

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Forms of critical review

The form of critical review will depend on research question and aim.

The most widely used forms of review, along with their overall function, include:

Integrative review, which critiques and synthesises representative literature on a topic in an integrative way to either generate new frameworks and perspectives on a topic for testing or, alternatively, reveal an area where it is unclear what is happening (a black box).

Theoretical review, which examines the body of theory that has accumulated in regard to an issue, concept, theory or phenomenon. Theoretical reviews are often used to establish what theories exist and the relationships between them. They are also used

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Forms of critical review

to reveal a lack of appropriate theories or that current theories are inadequate for explaining new or emerging research problems. They can therefore be used as the basis for developing new theory to be tested, or revealing an area where it is unclear what is happening (a black box).

Historical review, which examines the evolution of research on a particular topic over a period of time to place it in an historical context.

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Forms of critical review

Methodological review, which focuses on research approaches, strategies, data collection techniques or analysis procedures, rather than the research findings. Methodological reviews are often used to provide a framework for understanding a method or methodology and to enable researchers to draw on a wide body of methodological knowledge.

Systematic Review, which uses a comprehensive pre-planned strategy for locating, critically appraising, analysing and synthesising existing research that is pertinent to a clearly formulated research question to allow conclusions to be reached about what is known.

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The content and structure of a critical review



Box 3.2 Checklist

Evaluating the content of your critical literature review

- ✓ Have you ensured that the literature covered relates clearly to your research question and objectives?
- ✓ Have you covered the most relevant and significant theories of recognised experts in the area?
- ✓ Have you covered the most relevant and significant literature or at least a representative sample?
- ✓ Have you included up-to-date relevant literature?
- ✓ Have you referenced all the literature used in the format prescribed in the assessment criteria?

Chapter
03**The content and structure of a critical review**

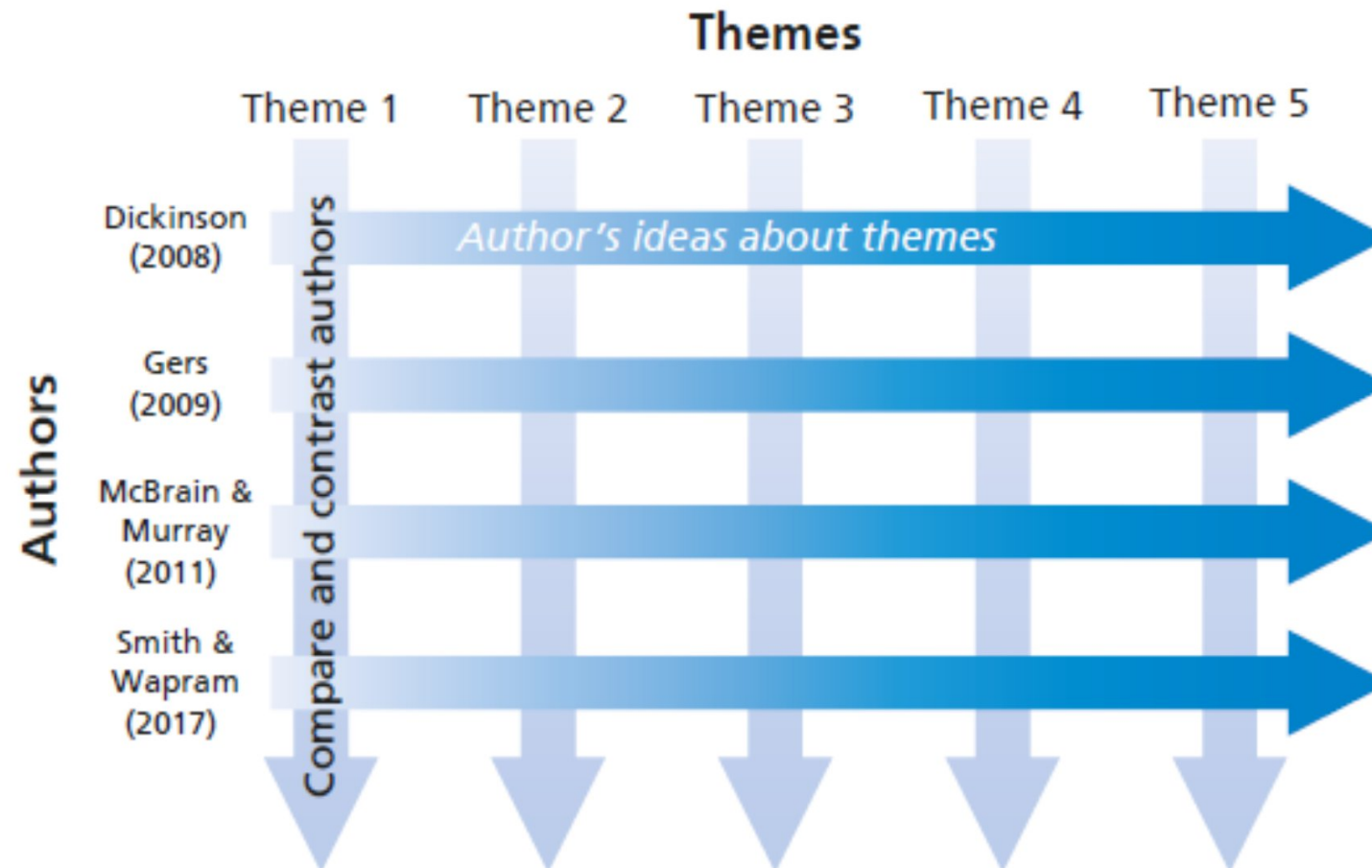
In considering the content of your critical review, you will therefore need:

- to include the key academic theories within your chosen area of research that are pertinent to, or contextualise, your research question;
- to demonstrate that your knowledge of your chosen area is up to date;
- to enable those reading your project report to find the original publications which you cite through clear complete referencing.

Chapter
03**The content and structure of a critical review****Possible structures for a critical review**

The precise structure of the critical review is usually your choice, although you should check, as it may be specified in the assessment criteria. Three common structures are:

- a single chapter;
- a series of chapters (for example in a larger research project);
- occurring throughout the project report as you tackle various issues (for example where your research project is conducted inductively).



Chapter
03**The content and structure of a critical review**

Although there is no single structure that your critical review should take, students have found it useful to think of the review as a funnel in which you:

- 1 start at a more general level before narrowing down to your specific research question(s) and objectives;
- 2 provide a brief overview of key ideas and themes;
- 3 summarise, compare and contrast the research of the key authors;
- 4 narrow down to highlight previous research work most relevant to your own research;
- 5 provide a detailed account of the findings of this research and show how they are related;
- 6 highlight those aspects where your own research will provide fresh insights;
- 7 lead the reader into subsequent sections of your project report, which explore these issues.

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Literature sources

The literature sources you are likely to make most use of are often referred to as:

- secondary literature sources, these being formally published items such as journals and books;
- grey (or primary) literature sources, these being items produced by all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which are not controlled by commercial publishers; including materials such as reports and conference proceedings.

The main secondary and primary literature sources that you are likely to use are outlined in the table below:

Source	Content	Use for the literature review	Coverage by online databases	Likely availability
Refereed (peer-reviewed) academic journal	Detailed reports of research. Written by experts and evaluated by other experts to assess quality and suitability for publication. Rigorous attention paid to detail and verification.	Most useful of all.	Well covered. In addition, content pages often available for searching via publishers' websites.	Accessible online through various subscription services. Increasingly available via institutional repositories, national 'access to research' initiatives or social networking platforms. Those not available can usually be obtained using inter-library loans.
Non-refereed academic journal	May contain detailed reports of research. Selected by editor or editorial board with subject knowledge.	Varies considerably. Beware of bias.	Reasonably well covered. In addition, content pages often available for searching via publishers' websites.	Majority accessible online through various subscription services. Increasingly available via institutional repositories, national 'access to research' initiatives or social networking platforms. Those not available can usually be obtained using inter-library loans.
Professional journals	Mix of news items and practical detailed accounts. Sometimes include summaries of research.	Insights into practice but use with caution.	Reasonably well covered by online databases. In addition, content pages often available for searching via professional associations' websites.	Majority accessible online through various subscription services. Those not available can usually be obtained using inter-library loans. Professional associations may also provide access to their journals via their own web pages.
Trade journals/magazines	Mix of news items and practical detailed accounts.	Insights into practice but use with caution.	Content pages often available for searching via professional associations' websites.	Not as widely available in university libraries as academic and refereed journals. Most trade associations will have an associated website.
Books and e-books	Written for specific audiences. Usually in an ordered and relatively accessible format. Often draw on wide range of sources.	Particularly useful for an overview and to find recognised experts.	Well covered by abstracts and indexes. Searches can be undertaken on remote university OPACs* via the Internet.	Widely available. Those not available locally can be obtained using inter-library loans.

(continued)

Source	Content	Use for the literature review	Coverage by online databases	Likely availability
Newspapers	Written for a particular market segment. Filtered dependent on events. May be written from particular viewpoint.	Good for topical developments. Beware of possible bias in reporting and coverage.	National newspapers reasonably well covered by specialised databases.	Recent paper copies of home nation 'quality' newspapers may be kept as reference in university libraries. Online access to stories, often with additional information on the websites, for most national and international 'quality' newspapers via subscription services.
Conference proceedings	Selected papers presented at a conference.	Can be very useful if on same theme as research.	Depends on conference, although often limited. Specialist indexes sometimes available, such as 'Index to conference proceedings'.	Not widely held by university libraries. Can be difficult to find unless online. Increasingly only contain abstracts.
Reports	Topic specific. Written by academics and organisations. Those from established organisations often of high quality.	Very useful, when matches your topic.	Poor, although some specialised indexes exist.	Not widely held by university libraries. Often available online. May be possible to obtain others using inter-library loans.
Theses	Often most up-to-date research but very specific.	Good for doctorate level (and to a lesser extent MPhil) research degrees, otherwise less useful.	Covered by indices of theses.	Increasingly available online, although can also be obtained using inter-library loans. May still only be one hard (paper) copy.

Name	Coverage
Access to Research	Online database for locating walk-in access to over 15 million research articles (including Business and Management) via participating UK public libraries
Blackwell Reference Online	Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Management, Blackwell 'handbooks' and 'Companions' in Management
British National Bibliography (BNB)	Bibliographic information for books and serials (journals) deposited at the British Library by UK and Irish publishers since 1950
British Library Integrated Catalogue	Online catalogue of print and electronic resources held by the British Library. Includes reference collections and document supply collections
British Library Management and Business Studies Portal	Online interface to digital full-text research reports, summaries, working papers, videos and articles as well as details of journal articles, sound recordings, video and other resources relevant to business and management
British Newspapers 1600–1900	Cross-searchable interface to full-text British Newspapers
Business Source Complete (also referred to as EBSCO)	Database including full-text articles from over 3,500 management, business, economics and information technology journals. Contains a wide range of trade and professional titles. Gives access to <i>Datamonitor</i>
Conference Index	British Library database containing proceedings of all significant conferences held worldwide (over 400,000 at time of writing)
Emerald Management eJournals (also known as Emerald Insight)	Database providing access to over 170,000 articles from over 300 journals in management and complementary subjects
EThOS (E Thesis Online Service)	Aggregated record of all doctoral theses awarded by UK HEIs dating back to 1800. Approximately 475,000 records with free access to c. 160,000 digitised theses.
Hospitality and Tourism Index	Access to hospitality and tourism journals and trade magazines since 1924
IngentaConnect	Details of articles from over 13,000 publications, some of which are available on subscription. Pay-per-view access available. Updated daily
ISI Web of Knowledge	Includes access to a wide range of services, including citation indexes for social sciences and for arts and humanities
JournalTOCs	Tables of contents (TOCs) for over 12,500 journals. Can specify journals for which there is a wish to receive future TOCs
JSTOR	Database containing full-text journals, most going back to first issue (in some cases going back to the eighteenth or nineteenth century). Covers sciences, social sciences and arts and humanities. Most recent years usually not available
Key Note	Database containing detailed market reports covering a range of sectors

(continued)

Name	Coverage
Mintel Reports	Database containing detailed market research reports on wide range of sectors
Nexis	Database of full text of UK national and regional newspapers. Increasing international coverage and company profiles and industry reports
Orbis	Information on companies from around the world
ProQuest Business Premium Collection	Database covering over 5,400 journals, covering all areas of business, over 80 per cent in full text. Includes wide range of trade and professional titles and working papers
Regional Business News	Database of full text regional business publications for USA and Canada. Updated daily
Sage Premier	Database of full text for over 1,000 peer reviewed journals including business, humanities, social sciences and research methods since 1999
Science Direct	Database of full text of Elsevier journals including social sciences
Social Science Citation Index	Access to current and retrospective bibliographic information, author abstracts, and cited references found in over 1,700 social sciences journals covering more than 50 disciplines. Also covers items from approximately 3,300 of the world's leading science and technology journals
Times Digital Archive 1785–2010	Database containing complete digital editions (including photographs, illustrations and advertisements) from <i>The Times</i> national newspaper (UK)
Web of Knowledge	Single access point to Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports, Current Contents and many others
Wiley Online	Database of 1,100 full-text journals including business and law
ZETOC	British Library's index of journals and conference proceedings tables of contents (TOCs). Allows setting up of email alerts of selected journal contents pages

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Planning your literature search

Before commencing your literature search, it is suggested that you undertake further planning by writing down your search strategy and, if possible, discussing it with your project supervisor. This should include:

- the parameters of your search;
- the search terms and phrases you intend to use;
- the online databases and search engines you intend to use;
- the criteria you intend to use to select the relevant and useful studies from all the items you find.

While it is inevitable that your search strategy will be refined as your literature search progresses, we believe that such a planned approach is important as it forces you to think carefully about your research strategy and justify, at least to yourself, why you are doing what you are doing.

Chapter
03**Planning your literature search****Defining the parameters of your search**

For most research questions and objectives, you will have a good idea of which subject matter is going to be relevant. You will, however, be less clear about the parameters within which you need to search. In particular, you need to be clear about the following:

- language of publication (e.g. English);
- subject area (e.g. entrepreneurship);
- business sector (e.g. Technology);
- geographical area (e.g. Middle East);
- publication period (e.g. the last 10 years);
- literature type (e.g. refereed journals and books).

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Planning your literature search

Generating your search terms

It is important at this stage to read both articles by key authors and recent review articles in the area of your research. This will help you to define your subject matter and to suggest appropriate search terms and phrases.

Recent review articles in your research area are often helpful here, as they discuss the current state of research for a particular topic and can help you to refine your search terms. In addition, they will probably contain references to other work that is pertinent to your research question(s) and objectives. If you are unsure about review articles, your project supervisor should be able to point you in the right direction. Another potentially useful source of references are dissertations and theses in your university's library.



Box 3.5 Focus on student research

Generating search terms

Han's research question was, 'How do the actual management requirements of a school pupil record administration system differ from those suggested by the literature?' She brainstormed this question with her peer group, all of whom were teachers in Hong Kong. The resulting list included the following search terms and phrases:

schools, pupil records, administration, user requirements, computer, management information system, access, legislation, information, database, security, UK, Hong Kong, theories

The group evaluated these and others. As a result, the following search terms (and phrases) were selected:

pupil records, management information system, computer, database, user requirement

Online dictionaries and encyclopaedias were used subsequently to add to the choice of search terms:

student record, MIS, security

Han made a note of these prior to using them in combination to search the tertiary literature sources.

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Conducting literature search

literature search will probably be conducted using a variety of approaches:

- searching using online databases;
- obtaining relevant literature referenced in books and journal articles you have already read;
- browsing and scanning secondary literature in library;
- general online searching.

Eventually it is likely you will be using a variety of these in combination. However, it is suggested that you start your search by obtaining relevant literature that has been referenced in books and articles you have already read.

Chapter
03**Conducting literature search****Searching using databases**

It is very tempting with easy access to the Internet to start your literature search with a general search engine such as Google. While this can retrieve some useful information, it must be treated with care. Your project report is expected to be an academic piece of work and hence must use academic sources. Therefore it is essential that you use online literature sources which provide access to academic literature. These consist of three types of online databases and are listed in order of likely importance to your search:

**Chapter
03**

Conducting literature search

- 1 Full-text (online) databases that index and provide abstracts and full-text of articles from a range of journals (and sometimes books, chapters from books, reports, theses and conferences), as well as the full text of articles.
- 2 Abstracts that only include an index of the abstracts of articles from a range of journals (and sometimes books, chapters from books, reports, theses and conferences), hence the name abstract.
- 3 Indexes that, as the name suggests, only index articles from a range of journals (and sometimes books, chapters from books, reports, theses and conferences).

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Conducting literature search

Within all of these, the information provided will be sufficient to locate the item – for example, for journal articles:

- author or authors of the article;
- date of publication;
- title of the article;
- title of the journal;
- volume (and part number) of the journal issue;
- page numbers of the article.

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03

Conducting literature search

Once your search terms have been identified, searching using databases is a relatively straightforward process. You need to:

- 1 make a list of the search terms that describe your research question(s) and objectives;
- 2 search appropriate online databases;
- 3 note precise details, including the search strings used, of the actual searches you have undertaken for each database;
- 4 note the full reference of each item found; this can normally be done by importing the references into software for managing bibliographies, such as Endnote™ or Reference Manager™ or research tools such as ‘Mendeley’ or ‘Zotero’.
- 5 Wherever possible import the article into your bibliography or research tool or, alternatively, download it in PDF format and save it on your device.



Box 3.7 Checklist

Minimising problems with your database search

- ✓ Is the spelling incorrect? Behaviour is spelt with a 'u' in the UK but without in the USA.
- ✓ Is the language incorrect? Chemists in the UK but drug stores in the USA.
- ✓ Are you using incorrect terminology? In recent years some terms have been replaced by others, such as 'redundancy' being replaced by 'downsizing'.
- ✓ Are you using recognised acronyms and abbreviations? For example, UK for United Kingdom or BA instead of British Airways.
- ✓ Are you avoiding jargon and using accepted terminology? For example, downsizing rather than redundancy.
- ✓ Are you searching over a sensible publication period? For example, the last 15 years rather than the last five years.
- ✓ Are you searching the most suitable type of literature for your research project? For example, peer-reviewed (refereed) journal articles rather than all articles.

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03

Conducting literature search

Searches normally use a combination of search terms linked using Boolean logic . These are known as search strings and enable you to combine, limit or widen the variety of items found using ‘link terms’

Connector	Purpose	Example	Outcome
AND	Narrows search	Recruitment AND interviewing AND skills	Only articles containing all three search terms selected
OR	Widens search	Recruitment OR selection	Articles with at least one search term selected
NOT	Excludes terms from search	Recruitment NOT selection	Selects articles containing the search term 'recruitment' that do not contain the search term 'selection'



Box 3.11

Focus on student research

Assessing the utility of an article using the abstract

Jana's research project was about how small- and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) use of formal and informal learning differed between Eastern and Western European countries. In a search using the Emerald Insight online database she had found a peer-reviewed article in the *European Journal of Training and Development* by Saunders, Gray and Goregaokar (2014) that she considered might be useful. She decided to read the abstract online to check.

The abstract confirmed that the **Purpose** of the article was to explore how SMEs learn and innovate using both formal and informal learning. More details regarding this were given in the **findings** section of the abstract. The **design/methodology/approach** indicated that the research had been undertaken with over 1,000 SMEs, data being collected using both questionnaires and focus groups. The **research limitations/implications** section indicated the need for further research to understand the interrelationships between informal learning, crisis events and SME innovation. Jana wondered if this might be a good aspect to focus on in her research.

Based on this information, Jana decided the article was likely to be useful for her research project, so she downloaded it and saved an electronic copy in PDF format.

Reading critically and evaluating the literature



Box 3.12 Checklist

Evaluating the relevance, value and sufficiency of literature to your research

Relevance

- ✓ How recent is the item?
- ✓ Is the item likely to have been superseded?
- ✓ Are the research questions or objectives sufficiently close to your own to make it relevant to your own research (in other words, does the item meet your relevance criteria for inclusion)?
- ✓ Is the context sufficiently different to make it marginal to your research question(s) and objectives (in other words, is the item excluded by your relevance criteria)?
- ✓ Have you seen references to this item (or its author) in other items that were useful?
- ✓ Does the item support or contradict your arguments? For either it will probably be worth reading!

Value

- ✓ Has the item been subject to a reviewing process prior to publication?

- ✓ Does the item appear to be biased? For example, does it use an illogical argument, emotionally toned words or appear to choose only those cases that support the point being made? Even if it is, it may still be relevant to your critical review.
- ✓ What are the methodological omissions within the work (e.g. sample selection, data collection, data analysis)? Even if there are many it still may be of relevance.
- ✓ Is the precision sufficient? Even if it is imprecise it may be the only item you can find and so still of relevance!
- ✓ Does the item provide guidance for future research?

Sufficiency

- ✓ As I read new items, do I recognise the authors and the ideas from other items I have already read?
- ✓ Have I read the work by those acknowledged by others as key researchers in my research area?
- ✓ Can I critically discuss the academic context of my research with confidence?
- ✓ Have I read sufficient items to satisfy the assessment criteria for my project report?

Sources: Authors' experience; Bell and Waters (2014); Colquitt (2013); Fisher (2010); Jankowicz (2005)

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Bibliographic details

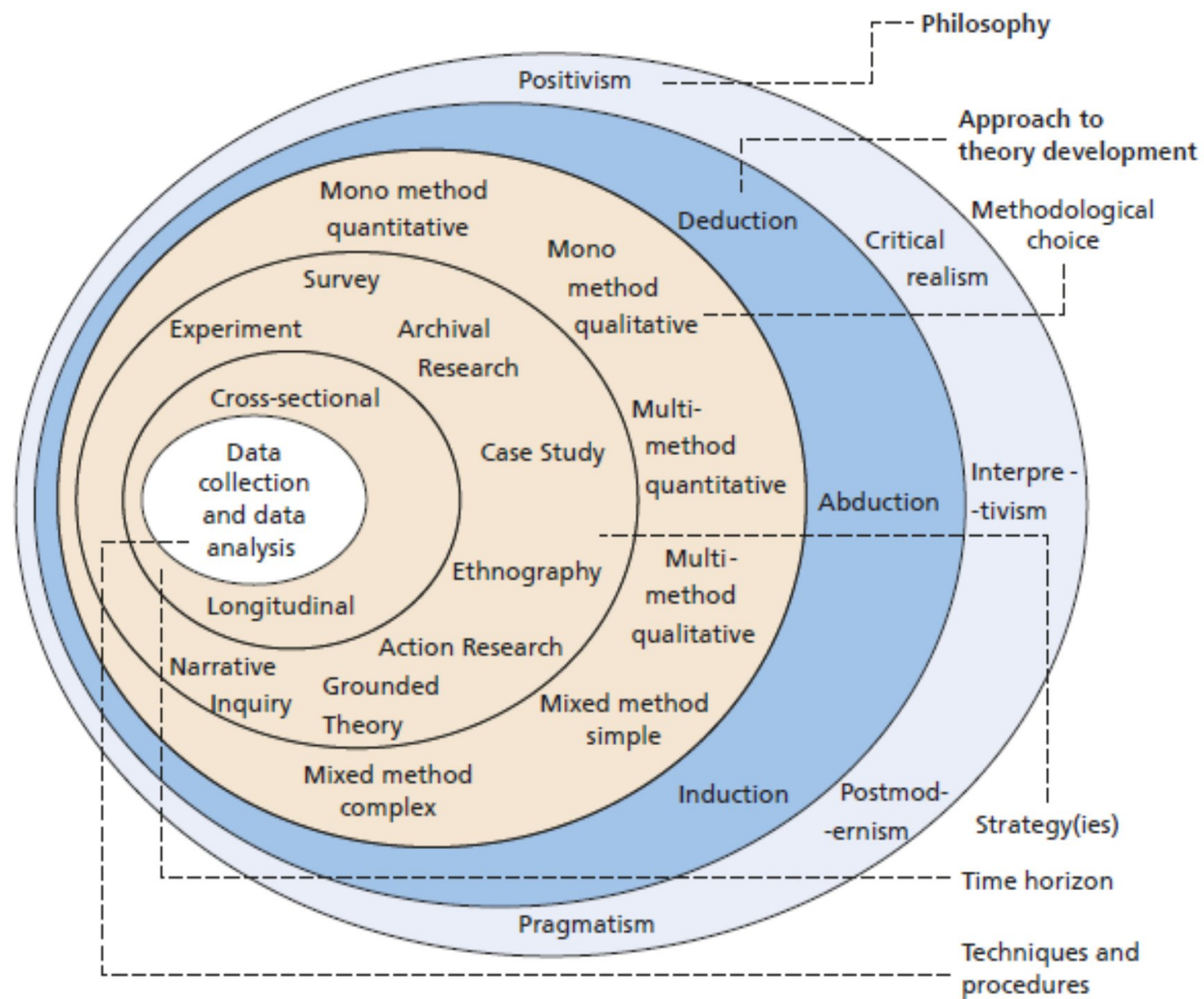
For some project reports you will be required to include a bibliography . Convention dictates that this should include all the relevant items you consulted for your project, including those not directly referred to in the text.

For the majority, you will be asked to include only a list of references for those items referred to directly in the text. The bibliographic details contained in both need to be sufficient to enable readers to find the original items. These details are summarised in table below .

Table 2.2 Bibliographic details required

Journal	Book	Chapter in an edited book
• Author(s) – family name, first name, initials • Year of publication (in parentheses) • Title of article • Title of journal (italicised) • Volume • Part/issue • Page numbers (preceded by 'p'. for page or 'pp'. for pages)	• Author(s) – family name, first name initials • Year of publication (in parentheses) • Title and subtitle of book (italicised) • Edition (unless first) • Place of publication • Publisher	• Author(s) – family name, first name initials • Year of publication (in parentheses) • Title of chapter • Author(s) of book – family name, first name initials • Title and subtitle of book (italicised) • Edition (unless first) • Place of publication • Publisher • Page numbers of chapter (preceded by 'pp'. for pages)

Information	Reason
ISBN	The identifier for any book, and useful if the book has to be requested on inter-library loan
DOI	The digital object identifier is both permanent and unique, meaning an electronic document can be found more easily
Class number (e.g. Dewey decimal)	Useful to locate books in your university's library and as a pointer to finding other books on the same subject
Quotations	Always note useful quotations in full and with the page number of the quote; if possible also save entire document as a PDF file
Where it was found	Noting where you found the item is useful, especially if it is not in your university library and you could only take notes
The search engine, database or other resource used to locate it	Useful to help identify possible resources for follow-up searches
Evaluative comments	Your personal notes on the value of the item to your research in relation to your relevance and value criteria
When the item was consulted	Especially important for items found via the Internet as these may disappear without trace
Filename	Useful if you have saved the document as a PDF file



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The philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneurship research

What is research philosophy?

The term research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. Although this sounds rather profound, it is precisely what you are doing when embarking on research: developing knowledge in a particular field.

The knowledge development you are embarking upon may not be as dramatic as a new theory of human motivation, but even addressing a specific problem in a particular organization you are, nonetheless, developing new knowledge.

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The philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneurship research

Whether you are consciously aware of them or not, at every stage in your research you will make a number of types of assumptions. These include (but are not limited to) assumptions about the realities you encounter in your research (ontological assumptions), about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), and about the extent and ways your own values influence your research process (axiological assumptions). These assumptions inevitably shape how you understand your research questions, the methods you use and how you interpret your findings.

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The philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneurship research

A well-thought-out and consistent set of assumptions will constitute a credible research philosophy, which will underpin your methodological choice, research strategy and data collection techniques and analysis procedures.

This will allow you to design a coherent research project, in which all elements of research fit together.

In entrepreneurship, researchers need to be aware of the philosophical commitments they make through their choice of research strategy, since this will have a significant impact on what they do and how they understand what it is they are investigating.

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The philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneurship research

There are two things that you can do to start making a more active and informed philosophical choice:

- begin asking yourself questions about your research beliefs and assumptions;
- familiarise yourself with major research philosophies within entrepreneurship

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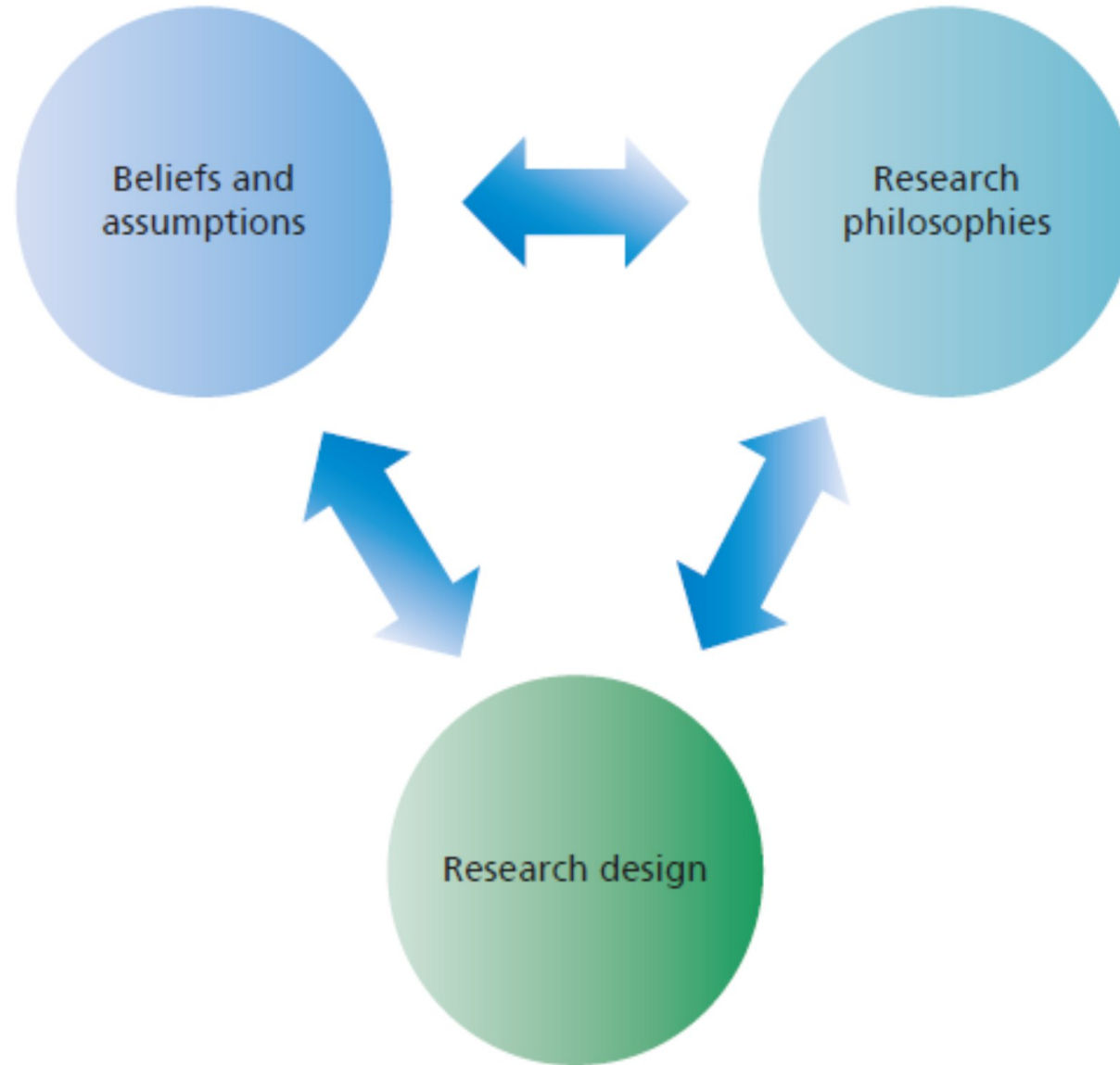
The philosophical underpinnings of entrepreneurship research

Is there a best philosophy for entrepreneurship research?

You may be wondering at this stage whether you could take a shortcut, and simply adopt ‘the best’ philosophy for entrepreneurship research.

One problem with such a shortcut would be the possibility of discovering a clash between ‘the best’ philosophy and your own beliefs and assumptions.

Another problem would be that entrepreneurship researchers do not agree about one best philosophy.



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Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. Although this may seem abstract and far removed from your intended research project, your ontological assumptions shape the way in which you see and study your research objects.

In entrepreneurship these objects include organisations, management, individuals' working lives and organisational events and artefacts. Your ontology therefore determines how you see the world of entrepreneurship and, therefore, your choice of what to research for your research project.

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Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

Epistemology refers to assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others.

The multidisciplinary context of business and management means that different types of knowledge – ranging from numerical data to textual and visual data, from facts to opinions, and including narratives and stories – can all be considered legitimate. Consequently, different business and management researchers adopt different epistemologies in their research, including projects based on archival research, autobiographical accounts, and narratives.

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Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

Axiology refers to the role of values and ethics. One of the key axiological choices that you will face as a researcher is the extent to which you wish to view the impact of your own values and beliefs on your research as a positive thing.

Consequently, you will need to decide how you deal with both your own values and those of the people you are researching. For example, you may believe, that our values are the guiding reason for all human action, and that while it is inevitable that you will incorporate your values during the process, it is crucially important that you explicitly recognise and reflect on these as you conduct and write up your research.

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Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions

Choosing one topic rather than another suggests that you think one of the topics is more important. Your research philosophy is a reflection of your values, as is your choice of data collection techniques.

For example, conducting a study where you place greatest importance on data collected using face-to-face interviews or ethnography as a research strategy suggests you value data collected through personal interaction with your participants more highly than views expressed through responses to an anonymous questionnaire

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03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

Now you are familiar with some types of assumptions that research philosophies make, you need to be able to distinguish between them. Earlier we discussed the emergence of entrepreneurship as a discipline and how it absorbed a range of philosophies from natural sciences, social sciences and arts and humanities.

Although this offers philosophical and methodological choice, it also means that entrepreneurship research philosophies are scattered along a multidimensional set of continua between two opposing extremes. The table below summarises the continua and their objectivist and subjectivist extremes in relation to the three types of philosophical assumptions that we have just discussed.

Assumption type	Questions	Continua with two sets of extremes		
		Objectivism	↔	Subjectivism
Ontology	• What is the nature of reality?	Real	↔	Nominal/decided by convention
	• What is the world like?	External	↔	Socially constructed
	• For example:	One true reality	↔	Multiple realities
	– What are organisations like?	(universalism)		(relativism)
	– What is it like being in organisations?	Granular (things)	↔	Flowing (processes)
	– What is it like being a manager or being managed?	Order	↔	Chaos
Epistemology	• How can we know what we know?	Adopt assumptions of the natural scientist	↔	Adopt the assumptions of the arts and humanities
	• What is considered acceptable knowledge?	Facts	↔	Opinions
	• What constitutes good-quality data?	Numbers	↔	Written, spoken and visual accounts
		Observable phenomena	↔	Attributed meanings
	• What kinds of contribution to knowledge can be made?	Law-like generalisations	↔	Individuals and contexts, specifics
Axiology	• What is the role of values in research? Should we try to be morally-neutral when we do research, or should we let our values shape research?	Value-free	↔	Value-bound
	• How should we deal with the values of research participants?	Detachment	↔	Integral and reflexive

Chapter
03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

Objectivism incorporates the assumptions of the natural sciences, arguing that the social reality that we research is external to us and others (referred to as social actors). This means that, ontologically, objectivism embraces realism, which, in its most extreme form, considers social entities to be like physical entities of the natural world, in so far as they exist independently of how we think of them, label them, or even of our awareness of them.

Because the interpretations and experiences of social actors do not influence the existence of the social world according to this view, an objectivist in the most extreme form believes that there is only one true social reality experienced by all social actors. This social world is made up of solid, granular and relatively unchanging ‘things’, including major social structures such as family, religion and the economy into which individuals are born.

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Objectivism and subjectivism

From an objectivist viewpoint, social and physical phenomena exist independently of individuals' views of them and tend to be universal and enduring in character. Consequently, it makes sense to study them in the same way as a natural scientist would study nature.

Epistemologically, objectivists seek to discover 'the truth' about the social world, through the medium of observable, measurable facts, from which law-like generalisations can be drawn about the universal social reality.

Axiologically, since the social entities and social actors exist independently of each other, objectivists strive to keep their research free of values, which they believe could bias their findings. They therefore also try to remain detached from their own values and beliefs throughout a rigorous scientific

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Objectivism and subjectivism

The social phenomenon of management can be researched in an objectivist way. You may argue that management is an objective entity and decide to adopt an objectivist stance to the study of particular aspects of management in a specific organisation.

In order to justify this, you would say that the managers in your organisation have job descriptions which prescribe their duties, there are operating procedures to which they are supposed to adhere, they are part of a formal structure which locates them in a hierarchy with people reporting to them and they in turn report to more senior managers.

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03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

This view emphasises the structural aspects of management and assumes that management is similar in all organisations. Aspects of the structure in which management operates may differ, but the essence of the function is very much the same in all organisations.

If you took this ontological stance, the aim of your research would be to discover the laws that govern management behaviour to predict how management would act in the future. You would also attempt to lay aside any beliefs you may have developed from interacting with individual managers in the past, in order to avoid these experiences colouring your conclusions about management in general.

Alternatively, you may prefer to consider the objective aspects of management as less important than the way in which managers attach their own individual meanings to their jobs and the way they think that those jobs should be performed. This approach would be much more subjectivist..



Box 4.1 Focus on student research

A management exodus at ChemCo

As part of a major organisational change, all the managers in the marketing department of the chemical manufacturer ChemCo left the organisation. They were replaced by new managers who were thought to be more in tune with the more commercially aggressive new culture that the organisation was trying to create. The new managers entering the organisation filled the roles of the managers who had left and had essentially the same formal job duties and procedures as their predecessors.

John wanted to study the role of management in ChemCo and in particular the way in which managers liaised with external stakeholders. He decided to use the new managers in the marketing department as his research 'subjects'.

In his research proposal he outlined briefly his research philosophy. He defined his ontological position as that of the objectivist. His reasoning was that management in ChemCo had a reality that was

separate from the managers who inhabited that reality. He pointed to the fact that the formal management structure at ChemCo was largely unchanged from that which was practised by the managers who had left the organisation. The process of management would continue in largely the same way in spite of the change in personnel.

Emma also wanted to study the role of management in ChemCo; however, she wanted to approach her research from a subjectivist perspective. In her research proposal, Emma pointed out that even though the formal management structure at ChemCo remained the same, the demographics of the new management workforce were very different. Whereas the managers who had left the company had been mostly close to retirement age, male and white, the new managers were typically young and much more gender- and ethnically-diverse. Taken together with the ChemCo's emphasis on the new organisational culture, this led Emma to question whether the formal job descriptions and processes were still interpreted by the new managers in the same way. Emma therefore decided to focus her research on the old and new managers' interpretations of organisational and managerial practices.

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03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

Subjectivism incorporates assumptions of the arts and humanities, asserting that social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (people). Ontologically, subjectivism embraces nominalism (also sometimes called conventionalism).

Nominalism, in its most extreme form, considers that the order and structures of social phenomena we study (and the phenomena themselves) are created by us as researchers and by other social actors through use of language, conceptual categories, perceptions and consequent actions.

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Objectivism and subjectivism

For nominalists, there is no underlying reality to the social world beyond what people (social actors) attribute to it, and, because each person experiences and perceives reality differently, it makes more sense to talk about multiple realities rather than a single reality that is the same for everyone.

A less extreme version of this is social constructionism. This puts forward that reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities, in other words reality is constructed intersubjectively.

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03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

As social interactions between actors are a continual process, social phenomena are in a constant state of flux and revision. This means it is necessary as a researcher to study a situation in detail, including historical, geographical and socio-cultural contexts in order to understand what is happening or how realities are being experienced.

Unlike an objectivist researcher who seeks to discover universal facts and laws governing social behaviour, the subjectivist researcher is interested in different opinions and narratives that can help to account for different social realities of different social actors.

Subjectivists believe that as they actively use these data they cannot detach themselves from their own values. They therefore openly acknowledge and actively reflect on and question their own values (this is called 'radical reflexivity') and incorporate these within their research.

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03**Objectivism and subjectivism**

Let us suppose that you have decided to research the portrayal of entrepreneurs by the media. Media producers, like other social actors, may interpret the situations which they are filming differently as a consequence of their own view of the world.

Their different interpretations are likely to affect their actions and the nature of the films and television programmes they produce. From a subjectivist view, the media producers' portrayals you are studying are a product of these producers' interaction with their environments and their seeking to make sense of it through their interpretation of events and the meanings that they draw from these events.

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Objectivism and subjectivism

As a subjectivist researcher, it is your role to seek to understand the different realities of the media producers in order to be able to make sense of and understand their portrayals of entrepreneurs in a way that is meaningful.

All this is some way from the objectivist position that being an entrepreneur has a reality that is separate from the media producers who perceive that reality. The subjectivist view is that the portrayal of entrepreneurship is constructed through the social interactions between media producers and entrepreneurs and is continually being revised as a result of this.

In other words, at no time is there a definitive entity called ‘entrepreneur’. Entrepreneurs are experienced differently by different media producers and, as an aggregate, the resultant portrayal is likely to be constantly changing.

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Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Positivism			
Real, external, independent One true reality (universalism) Granular (things) Ordered	Scientific method Observable and measurable facts Law-like generalisations Numbers Causal explanation and prediction as contribution	Value-free research Researcher is detached, neutral and independent of what is researched Researcher maintains objective stance	Typically deductive, highly structured, large samples, measurement, typically quantitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be analysed
Critical realism			
Stratified/layered (the empirical, the actual and the real) External, independent Intransient Objective structures Causal mechanisms	Epistemological relativism Knowledge historically situated and transient Facts are social constructions Historical causal explanation as contribution	Value-laden research Researcher acknowledges bias by world views, cultural experience and upbringing Researcher tries to minimise bias and errors Researcher is as objective as possible	Retroductive, in-depth historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency Range of methods and data types to fit subject matter

Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Interpretivism			
Complex, rich Socially constructed through culture and language Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities Flux of processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts too simplistic Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations New understandings and worldviews as contribution	Value-bound research Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective Researcher interpretations key to contribution Researcher reflexive	Typically inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted
Postmodernism			
Nominal Complex, rich Socially constructed through power relations Some meanings, interpretations, realities are dominated and silenced by others Flux of processes, experiences, practices	What counts as 'truth' and 'knowledge' is decided by dominant ideologies Focus on absences, silences and oppressed/repressed meanings, interpretations and voices Exposure of power relations and challenge of dominant views as contribution	Value-constituted research Researcher and research embedded in power relations Some research narratives are repressed and silenced at the expense of others Researcher radically reflexive	Typically deconstructive – reading texts and realities against themselves In-depth investigations of anomalies, silences and absences Range of data types, typically qualitative methods of analysis
Pragmatism			
Complex, rich, external 'Reality' is the practical consequences of ideas Flux of processes, experiences and practices	Practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts 'True' theories and knowledge are those that enable successful action Focus on problems, practices and relevance Problem solving and informed future practice as contribution	Value-driven research Research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs Researcher reflexive	Following research problem and research question Range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, action research Emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes

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Positivism

Positivism relates to the philosophical stance of the natural scientist and entails working with an observable social reality to produce law-like generalisations. It promises unambiguous and accurate knowledge and originates in the works of Francis Bacon, Auguste Comte and the early twentieth-century group of philosophers and scientists known as the Vienna Circle.

The label positivism refers to the importance of what is ‘posited’ –i.e. ‘given’. This emphasises the positivist focus on strictly scientific empiricist method designed to yield pure data and facts uninfluenced by human interpretation or bias.

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03**Five entrepreneurship philosophies**

If you were to adopt an extreme positivist position, you would see organisations and other social entities as real in the same way as physical objects and natural phenomena are real.

Epistemologically you would focus on discovering observable and measurable facts and regularities, and only phenomena that you can observe and measure would lead to the production of credible and meaningful data.

You would look for causal relationships in your data to create law-like generalisations like those produced by scientists. You would use these universal rules and laws to help you to explain and predict behaviour and events in organisations.

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As a positivist researcher you might use existing theory to develop hypotheses. These statements provide hypothetical explanations that can be tested and confirmed, in whole or part, or refuted, leading to the further development of theory which then may be tested by further research. However, this does not mean that, as a positivist, you necessarily have to start with existing theory. All natural sciences have developed from an engagement with the world in which data were collected and observations made prior to hypotheses being formulated and tested.

In fact, the original positivists emphasised the importance of inductive research due to the importance of empirical data, even though nowadays positivist research tends to be deductive. The hypotheses developed, as in Box 4.5 , would lead to the gathering of facts (rather than impressions) that would provide the basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

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Critical realism

It is important not to confuse the philosophy of critical realism with the more extreme form of realism underpinning the positivist philosophy. The latter, sometimes known as direct realism (or naïve empirical scientific realism), says that what you see is what you get: what we experience through our senses portrays the world accurately.

By contrast, the philosophy of critical realism focuses on explaining what we see and experience, in terms of the underlying structures of reality that shape the observable events. Critical realism originated in the late twentieth century in the work of Roy Bhaskar, as a response to both positivist direct realism and postmodernist nominalism (discussed later), and occupies a middle ground between these two positions.

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For critical realists, reality is the most important philosophical consideration, a structured and layered ontology being crucial. Critical realists see reality as external and independent, but not directly accessible through our observation and knowledge of it. Rather, what we experience is ‘the empirical’, in other words sensations, which are some of the manifestations of the things in the real world, rather than the actual things.

Critical realism claims there are two steps to understanding the world. First, there are the sensations and events we experience. Second, there is the mental processing that goes on sometime after the experience, when we ‘reason backwards’ from our experiences to the underlying reality that might have caused them (this reasoning backwards is essentially abductive, but is often called ‘retroduction’ by critical realists. Direct realism says that the first step is enough.

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If you believe that, as researchers, we need to look for the bigger picture of which we see only a small part, you may be leaning towards the critical realist philosophy.

Bhaskar(2011) argues that we will only be able to understand what is going on in the social world

if we understand the social structures that have given rise to the phenomena that we are trying to understand.

He writes that we can identify what we do not see through the practical and theoretical processes of the social sciences. Critical realist research therefore focuses on providing an explanation for observable events by looking for the underlying causes and mechanisms through which deep social structures shape everyday Entrepreneurial life. Due to this focus, much of critical realist research takes the form of in-depth historical analysis of social and organisational structures, and how they have changed over time (Reed 2005).

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Within their focus on the historical analysis of structures, critical realists embrace epistemological relativism, a (mildly) subjectivist approach to knowledge.

Epistemological relativism recognises that knowledge is historically situated (in other words, it is a product of its time and is specific to it), and that social facts are social constructions agreed on by people rather than existing independently (Bhaskar 2008).

This implies that critical realist notions of causality cannot be reduced to statistical correlations and quantitative methods, and that a range of methods is acceptable..

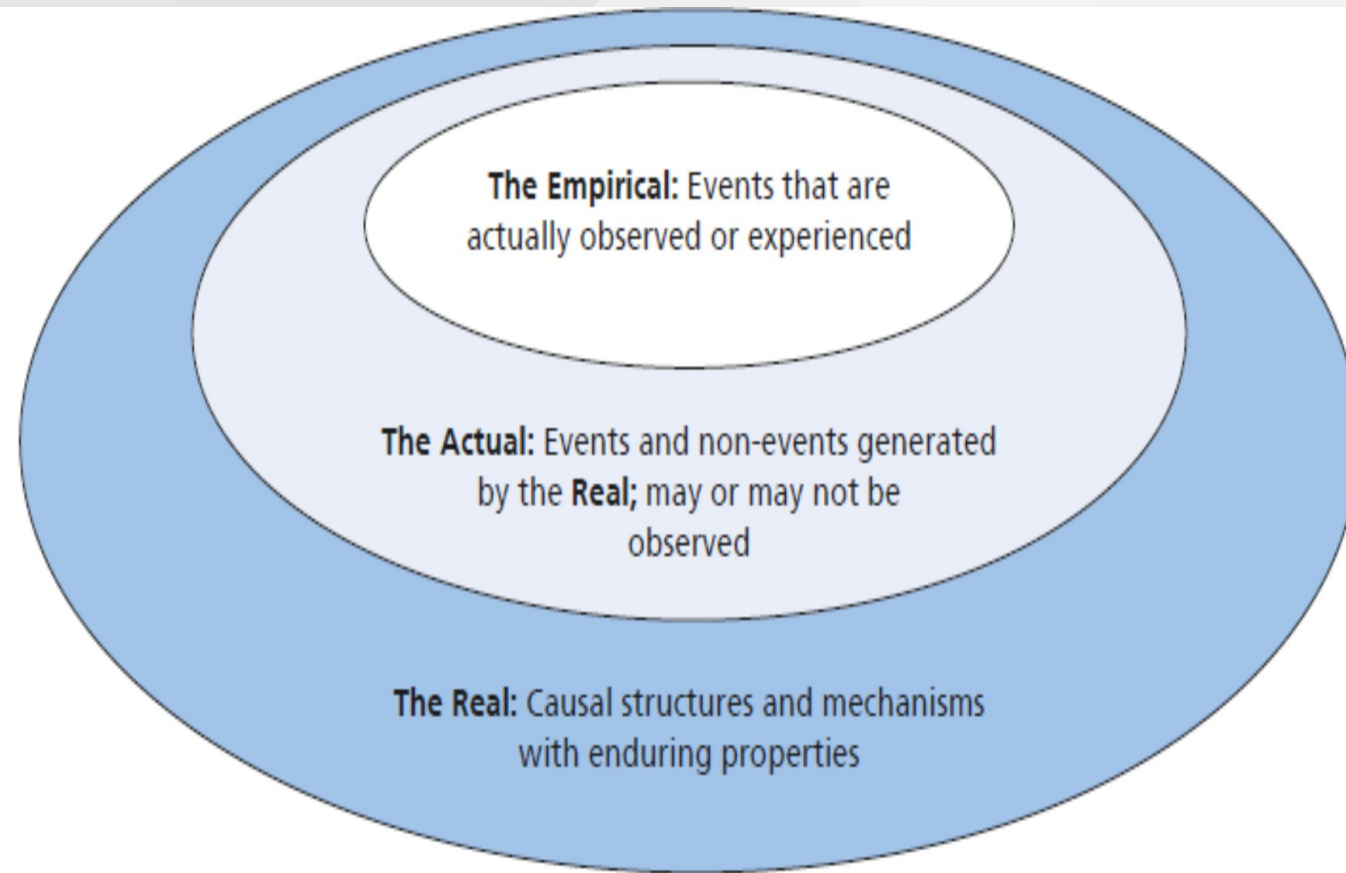
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A critical realist's axiological position follows from the recognition that our knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning and cannot be understood independently of the social actors involved.

This means that, as a critical realist researcher, you would strive to be aware of the ways in which your socio-cultural background and experiences might influence your research, and would seek to minimise such biases and be as objective as possible.



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Interpretivism

Interpretivism, like critical realism, developed as a critique of positivism but from a subjectivist perspective. Interpretivism emphasises that humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings. Interpretivists study these meanings.

Interpretivism emerged in early- and mid-twentieth-century Europe, in the work of German, French and occasionally English thinkers, and is formed of several strands, most notably hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism.

Interpretivism argues that human beings and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as

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Interpretivism argues that human beings and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena, and that therefore social sciences research needs to be different from natural sciences research rather than trying to emulate the latter.

As different people of different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times make different meanings, and so create and experience different social realities, interpretivists are critical of the positivist attempts to discover definite, universal ‘laws’ that apply to everybody.

Rather they believe that rich insights into humanity are lost if such complexity is reduced entirely to a series of law-like generalisations. The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts.

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For entrepreneurship researchers, this means looking, for example, at organisations from the perspectives of different groups of people. They would argue, for example, that the ways in which the CEO, board directors, managers, shop assistants, cleaners and customers see and experience a large retail company are different, so much so that they could arguably be seen as experiencing different workplace realities.

If research focuses on the experiences that are common to all at all times, much of the richness of the differences between them and their individual circumstances will be lost, and the understanding of the organisation that the research delivers will reflect this.

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Interpretivist researchers try to take account of this complexity by collecting what is meaningful to their research participants. Different strands of interpretivism place slightly different emphasis on how to do this in practice,

so phenomenologists, who study existence, focus on participants' lived experience; that is, the participants' recollections and interpretations of those experiences.

Hermeneuticists focus on the study of cultural artefacts such as texts, symbols, stories, and images.

Symbolic interactionists, whose tradition derives from pragmatist thinking (discussed later) and who see meaning as something that emerges out of interactions between people, focus on the observation and analysis of social interaction such as conversations, meetings, and teamwork.

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With its focus on complexity, richness, multiple interpretations and meaning-making, interpretivism is explicitly subjectivist. An axiological implication of this is that interpretivists recognise that their interpretation of research materials and data, and thus their own values and beliefs, play an important role in the research process.

Crucial to the interpretivist philosophy is that the researcher has to adopt an empathetic stance. The challenge for the interpretivist is to enter the social world of the research participants and understand that world from their point of view. Some would argue the interpretivist perspective is highly appropriate in the case of entrepreneurship research..

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Postmodernism

Postmodernism (not to be confused with postmodernity, which denotes a particular historical era) emphasises the role of language and of power relations, seeking to question accepted ways of thinking and give voice to alternative marginalised views. It emerged in the late twentieth century and has been most closely associated with the work of French philosophers Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Jean Baudrillard.

Postmodernism is historically entangled with the intellectual movement of poststructuralism. As the differences in focus between postmodernism and poststructuralism are subtle and have become less discernible over time.

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Postmodernists go even further than interpretivists in their critique of positivism and objectivism, attributing even more importance to the role of language. They reject the modern objectivist, realist ontology of things, and instead emphasise the chaotic primacy of flux, movement, fluidity and change. They believe that any sense of order is provisional and foundationless, and can only be brought about through our language with its categories and classifications.

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At the same time they recognise that language is always partial and inadequate. In particular, it always marginalises, suppresses and excludes aspects of what it claims to describe, while privileging and emphasising other aspects.

As there is no order to the social world beyond that which we give to it through language, there is no abstract way of determining the ‘right’ or the ‘true’ way to describe the world. Instead, what is generally considered to be ‘right’ and ‘true’ is decided collectively. These collective ‘choices’, in turn, are shaped by the power relations and by the ideologies that dominate particular contexts. This does not mean that the dominant ways of thinking are necessarily the ‘best’ – only that they are seen as such at a particular point in time by particular groups of people. Other perspectives that are suppressed are potentially just as valuable and have the power to create alternative worlds and truths.

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Postmodernist researchers seek to expose and question the power relations that sustain dominant realities. This takes the form of ‘deconstructing’ (taking apart) these realities, as if they were texts, to search for instabilities within their widely accepted truths, and for what has not been discussed – absences and silences created in the shadow of such truths.

Postmodernists strive to make what has been left out or excluded more visible by the deconstruction of what counts as ‘reality’ into ideologies and power relations that underpin it, as you would dismantle an old building into the bricks and mortar that make it up.

The goal of postmodern research is therefore to challenge radically the established ways of thinking and knowing and to give voice and legitimacy to the suppressed and marginalised ways of seeing and knowing that have been previously excluded.

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As a postmodernist researcher, you would, instead of approaching the organizational world as constituted by things and entities such as ‘management’, ‘performance’ and ‘resources’, focus on the ongoing processes of organising, managing and ordering that constitute such entities. You would challenge organisational concepts and theories, and seek to demonstrate what perspectives and realities they exclude and leave silent and whose interests they serve.

You would be open to the deconstruction of any forms of data – texts, images, conversations, voices and numbers. Like interpretivists, you would be undertaking in-depth investigations of phenomena. Fundamental to postmodernist research is the recognition that power relations between the researcher and research subjects shape the knowledge created as part of the research process. As power relations cannot be avoided, it is crucial for researchers to be open about their moral and ethical positions, and thus you would strive to be radically reflexive about your own thinking and writing.

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Pragmatism

By now you may be thinking: do these differences in assumptions really matter? The proponents of the philosophies discussed above would say that they do, as they delineate fundamentally different ways of seeing the world and carrying out research. However, you may be feeling differently. If you are becoming impatient with the battle of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions between the different philosophies, if you are questioning their relevance, and if you would rather get on with research that would focus on making a difference to entrepreneurial practice, you may be leaning towards the philosophy of pragmatism. However, you need to be sure that you are not treating pragmatism as an escape route from the challenge of understanding other philosophies!

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Pragmatism

By now you may be thinking: do these differences in assumptions really matter? The proponents of the philosophies discussed above would say that they do, as they delineate fundamentally different ways of seeing the world and carrying out research. However, you may be feeling differently. If you are becoming impatient with the battle of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions between the different philosophies, if you are questioning their relevance, and if you would rather get on with research that would focus on making a difference to entrepreneurial practice, you may be leaning towards the philosophy of pragmatism. However, you need to be sure that you are not treating pragmatism as an escape route from the challenge of understanding other philosophies!

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Pragmatism asserts that concepts are only relevant where they support action. Pragmatism originated in the late-nineteenth–early-twentieth-century USA in the work of philosophers Charles Pierce, William James and John Dewey. It strives to reconcile both objectivism and subjectivism, facts and values, accurate and rigorous knowledge and different contextualised experiences.

It does this by considering theories, concepts, ideas, hypotheses and research findings not in an abstract form, but in terms of the roles they play as instruments of thought and action, and in terms of their practical consequences in specific contexts. Reality matters to pragmatists as practical effects of ideas, and knowledge is valued for enabling actions to be carried out successfully.

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Approaches to theory development

If your research starts with theory, often developed from your reading of the academic literature, and you design a research strategy to test the theory, you are using a deductive approach.

Conversely, if your research starts by collecting data to explore a phenomenon and you generate or build theory (often in the form of a conceptual framework), then you are using an inductive approach.

Where you are collecting data to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and explain patterns, to generate a new or modify an existing theory which you subsequently test through additional data collection, you are using an abductive approach.

	Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory



Box 4.8

Focus on student research

Deductive, inductive and abductive research

Sadie decided to conduct a research project on violence at work and its effects on the stress levels of staff. She considered the different ways she would approach the work were she to adopt:

- the deductive approach;
- the inductive approach;
- the abductive approach.

If she adopted a deductive approach to her reasoning, she would have to:

- 1 start with the hypothesis that staff working directly with the public are more likely to experience the threat or reality of violence and resultant stress;
- 2 decide to research a population in which she would have expected to find evidence of violence, for example, a sizeable social security office;
- 3 administer a questionnaire to a large sample of staff in order to establish the extent of violence

(either actually experienced or threatened) and the levels of stress experienced by them;

- 4 be particularly careful about how she defined violence;
- 5 standardise the stress responses of the staff, for example, days off sick or sessions with a counsellor.

If she adopted an inductive approach then she might have decided to interview some staff who had been subjected to violence at work. She might have been interested in their feelings about the events that they had experienced, how they coped with the problems they experienced and their views about the possible causes of the violence.

If she adopted an abductive approach, she might have developed a conceptual model on the basis of her interview. She might then have used this model to develop a series of hypotheses and designed a questionnaire to collect data with which to test these hypotheses. Based on analyses of these data she might then have refined her conceptual model.

All approaches would have yielded valuable data about this problem (indeed, within this abductive approach, both inductive and deductive approaches were used at different stages). No approach should be thought of as better than the others. They are better at different things. It depends where her research emphasis lies.



Thank You

