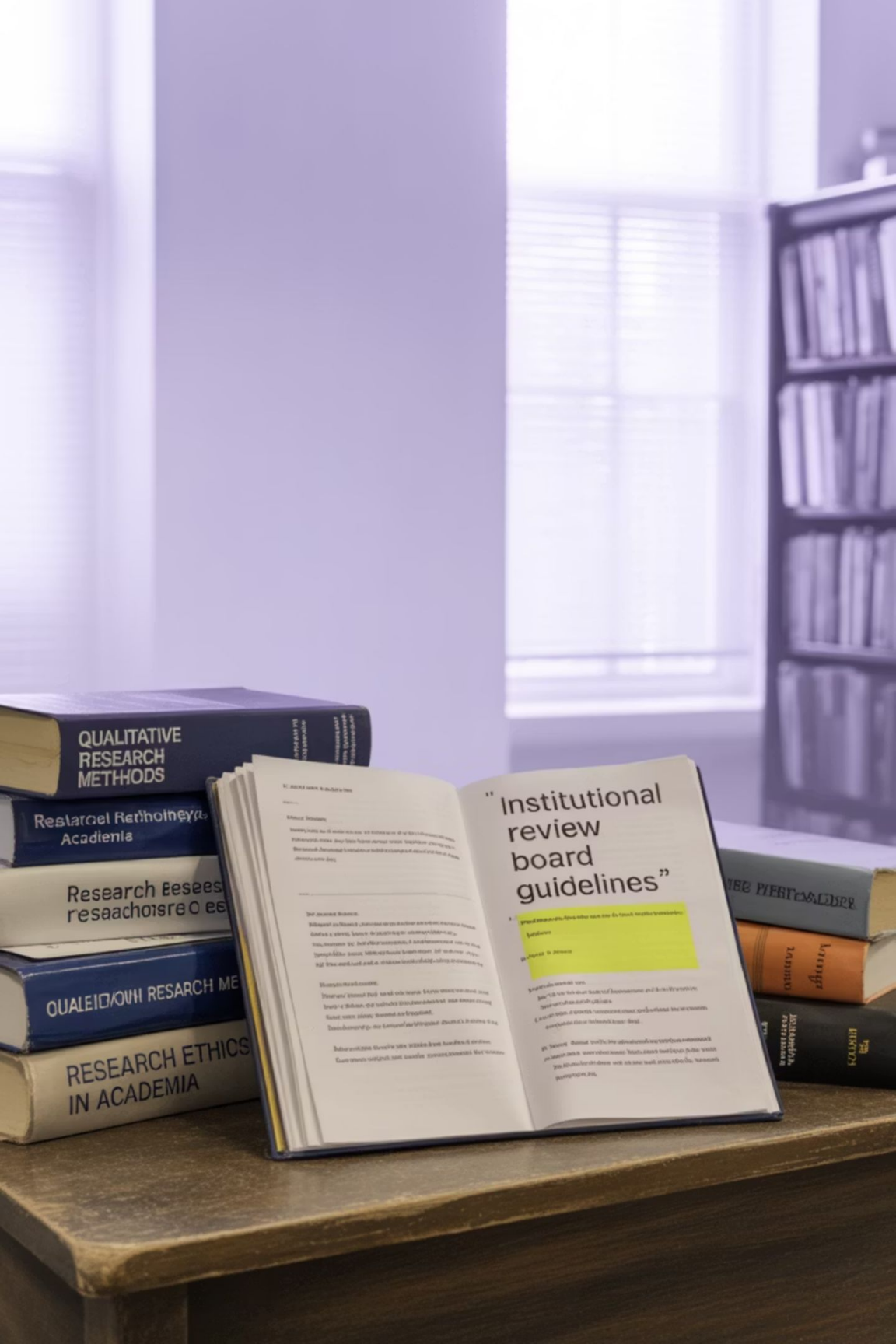


A stack of research books is placed on a wooden table. The top book is open, showing a page titled "Institutional review board guidelines" with a yellow sticky note. Below it, the spines of several other books are visible, including "QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS", "Research Ethics in Academia", and "RESEARCH ETHICS IN ACADEMIA". The background is a blurred image of a window with blinds and a bookshelf.

Research Methodology and Ethics for SME Studies

Welcome to Week 4. This week, we'll build on our literature review and problem definition work to explore research methodologies and ethical considerations essential for conducting rigorous studies in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Recap: Literature and Problem Refinement

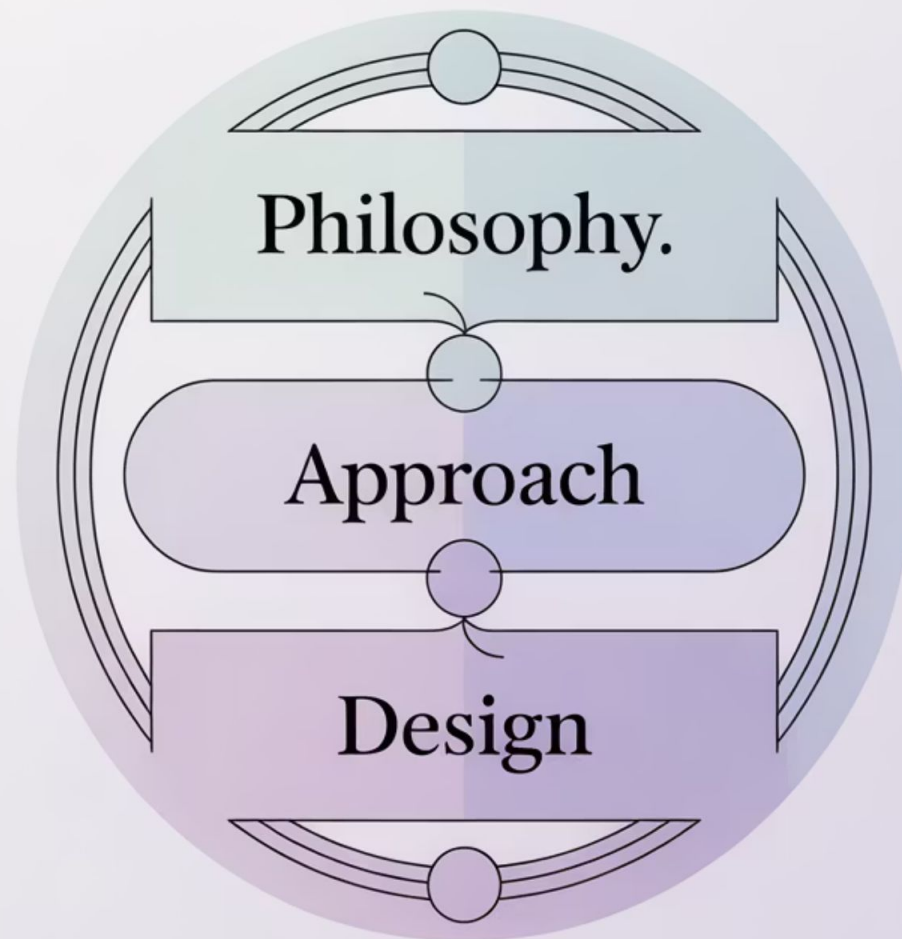
In previous weeks, we've focused on developing a strong foundation for your research through:

- Conducting comprehensive literature reviews
- Identifying research gaps in SME contexts
- Refining research questions and objectives
- Developing conceptual frameworks

This groundwork is essential as we now move toward selecting appropriate methodologies that align with your research questions and theoretical frameworks.



Introduction to Research Methodology



Research Philosophy

The underlying beliefs and assumptions about how knowledge is developed and validated in your field. Common philosophies include positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.

Research Approach

Deductive (testing theory), inductive (building theory), or abductive (combining both) approaches to reasoning and knowledge development.

Research Design

The overall strategy and structure for conducting your study, including time horizons (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal) and research strategies (case studies, surveys, experiments).

Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods

Quantitative Research

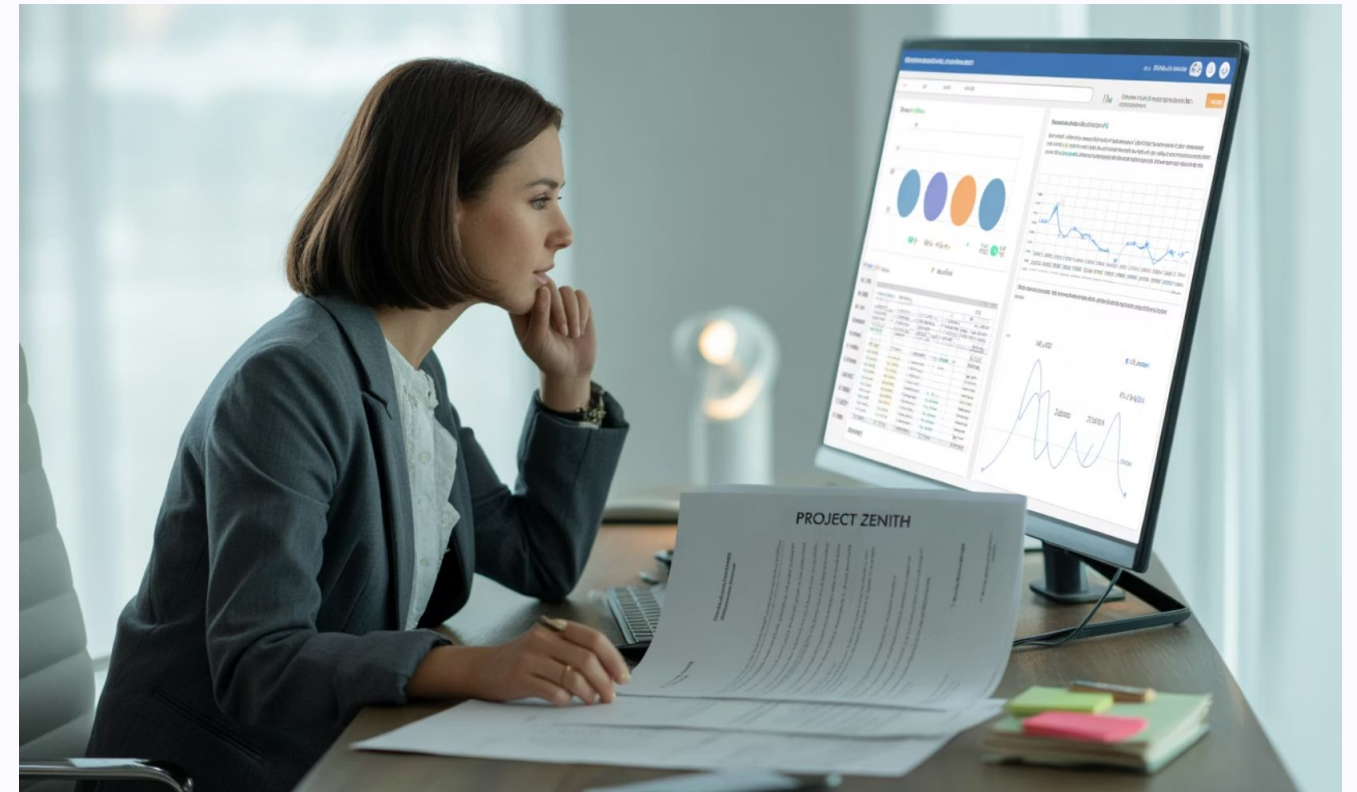
- Focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis
- Tests hypotheses and examines relationships between variables
- Examples: surveys with closed-ended questions, financial performance analysis

Qualitative Research

- Explores meanings, experiences, and perspectives
- Generates rich, descriptive data
- Examples: interviews, focus groups, observation

Mixed Methods

- Combines quantitative and qualitative approaches
- Provides more comprehensive understanding
- Examples: explanatory sequential design (quant → qual) or exploratory sequential design (qual → quant)



Choosing a Suitable Method: Justification

Align with Research Questions

Ensure your methodology directly addresses your research questions. "What" and "how many" questions often suit quantitative methods, while "why" and "how" questions may require qualitative approaches.

Consider Practical Constraints

Evaluate access to participants, time limitations, resources available, and your own methodological expertise when selecting methods for SME research.

Provide Clear Justification

Articulate why your chosen methodology is most appropriate for addressing your specific research problem in the SME context, citing methodological literature to support your choices.



Data Collection Tools: Surveys, Interviews, Documents



Surveys

Structured questionnaires with closed or open-ended questions. Effective for collecting standardized data from larger samples of SMEs. Consider online surveys for better reach and response rates.



Interviews

In-depth conversations with SME owners, managers, or employees. Can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. Valuable for exploring complex issues and gathering rich contextual data.



Document Analysis

Examination of company records, financial statements, policies, or industry reports. Provides historical context and objective data without participant bias. Often used to triangulate other data sources.



Research Ethics in SMEs: Issues and Protocols

Key Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent from all participants
- Confidentiality of sensitive business information
- Anonymity of participants and organizations
- Data protection and secure storage
- Power dynamics when researching vulnerable stakeholders
- Potential impact on business operations

Ethical Protocols

- Develop clear participant information sheets
- Create explicit consent forms
- Establish data management plans
- Arrange secure data storage systems
- Plan for ethical reporting of findings



Submitting an Ethics Form – Key Points

1 Complete All Sections

Ensure every section of the ethics application is thoroughly completed with detailed information about your research design, participants, and potential ethical issues.

2 Attach Supporting Documents

Include all necessary appendices such as participant information sheets, consent forms, interview guides, survey instruments, and data management plans.

3 Address Potential Risks

Identify all possible ethical risks in your SME research and clearly explain how you will mitigate them. Be especially attentive to commercial sensitivity and confidentiality concerns.

4 Allow Sufficient Time

Submit your ethics application well in advance of your planned research start date, as the review process may take several weeks and revisions might be required.

