

# **BM7043**

## **Research Methods**

### **Week 1 Lecture**

- 1. introduction to the module**
- 2. research philosophies and approaches**

# Why business research methods?

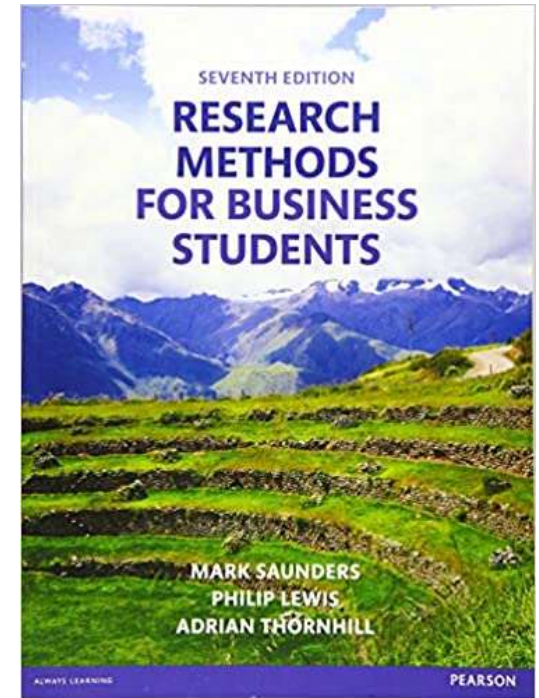
- **Critical thinking**
- **Independent learning and thinking**
- **Critically assessing evidence**
- **Constructing arguments**
- **Writing critically rather than descriptively**



# Core reading materials

## Course text:

- **Saunders, M., P. Lewis and A. Thornhill (2015) *Research Methods for Business Students*, Seventh Edition. Pearson.**
- **Other suggested readings for lectures and tutorials.**



**Available  
as an  
ebook from  
the Library**

# Assessment

- **Research proposal (100%)**
- **3,500 words**
- **This assessment is designed to prepare you for your 60-credit third-semester module.**
- **You have the option to choose from three types of proposals:**
- **dissertation proposal,**
- **consultancy proposal,**
- **or work placement proposal**
- **The final choice should be made in consultation with your project supervisor, who will be assigned to you in Week 5**

# Cheating and Plagiarism

***students are reminded of the University's rules on cheating and plagiarism and should not expect to be treated leniently if these are broken***



Any questions about the  
course structure and content?

# Lecture 1

## Research Philosophies

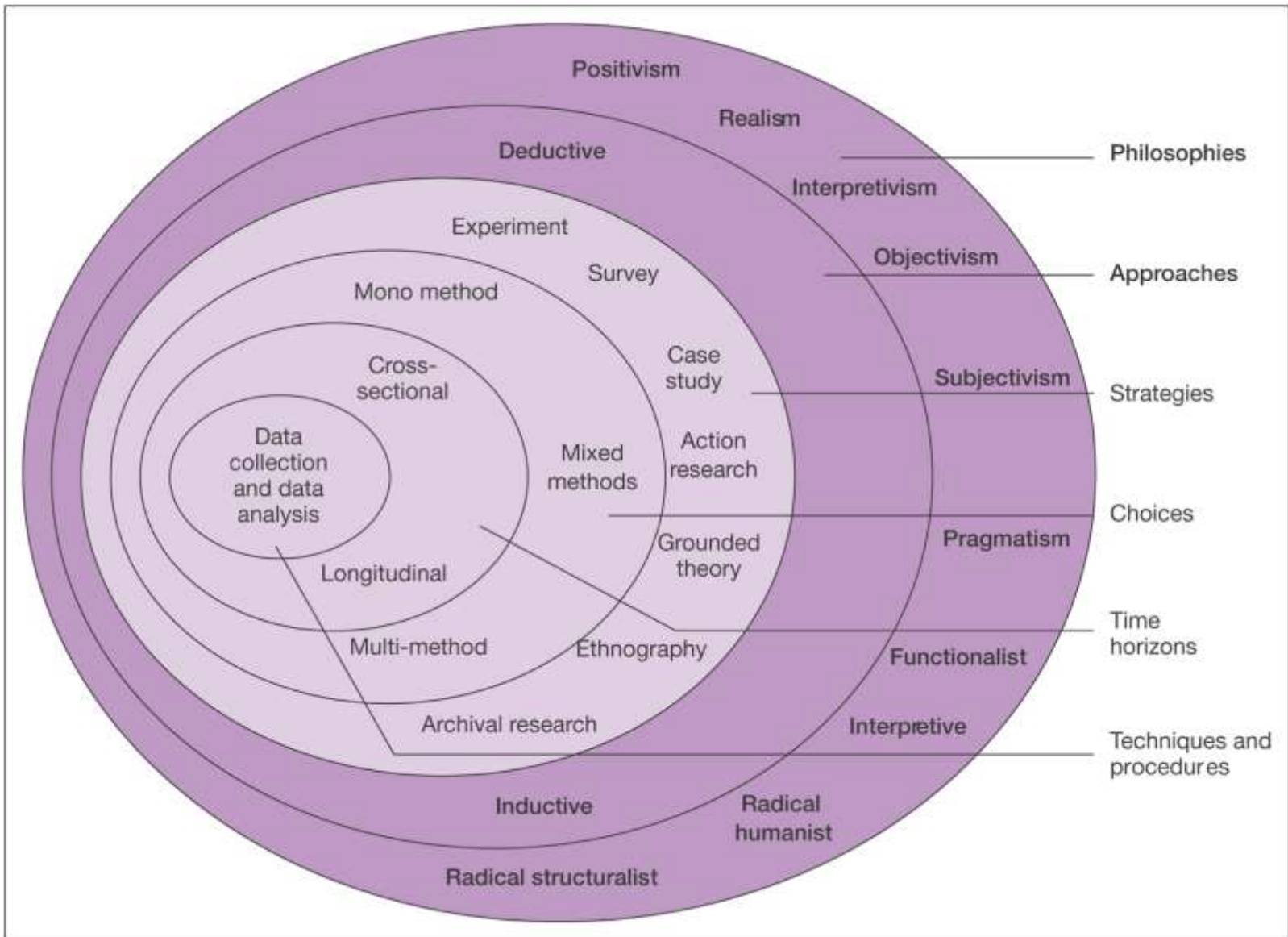


Figure 4.1 The research 'onion'

Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2006



# What is 'Business Research Methods' about?

- **research philosophies:** broader ideas about the nature of reality and how we can come to know this reality
- **research approaches:** what we believe is the best way of finding out about reality
- **research strategies**
- **research choices**
- **research time horizons**
- **research techniques and procedures**

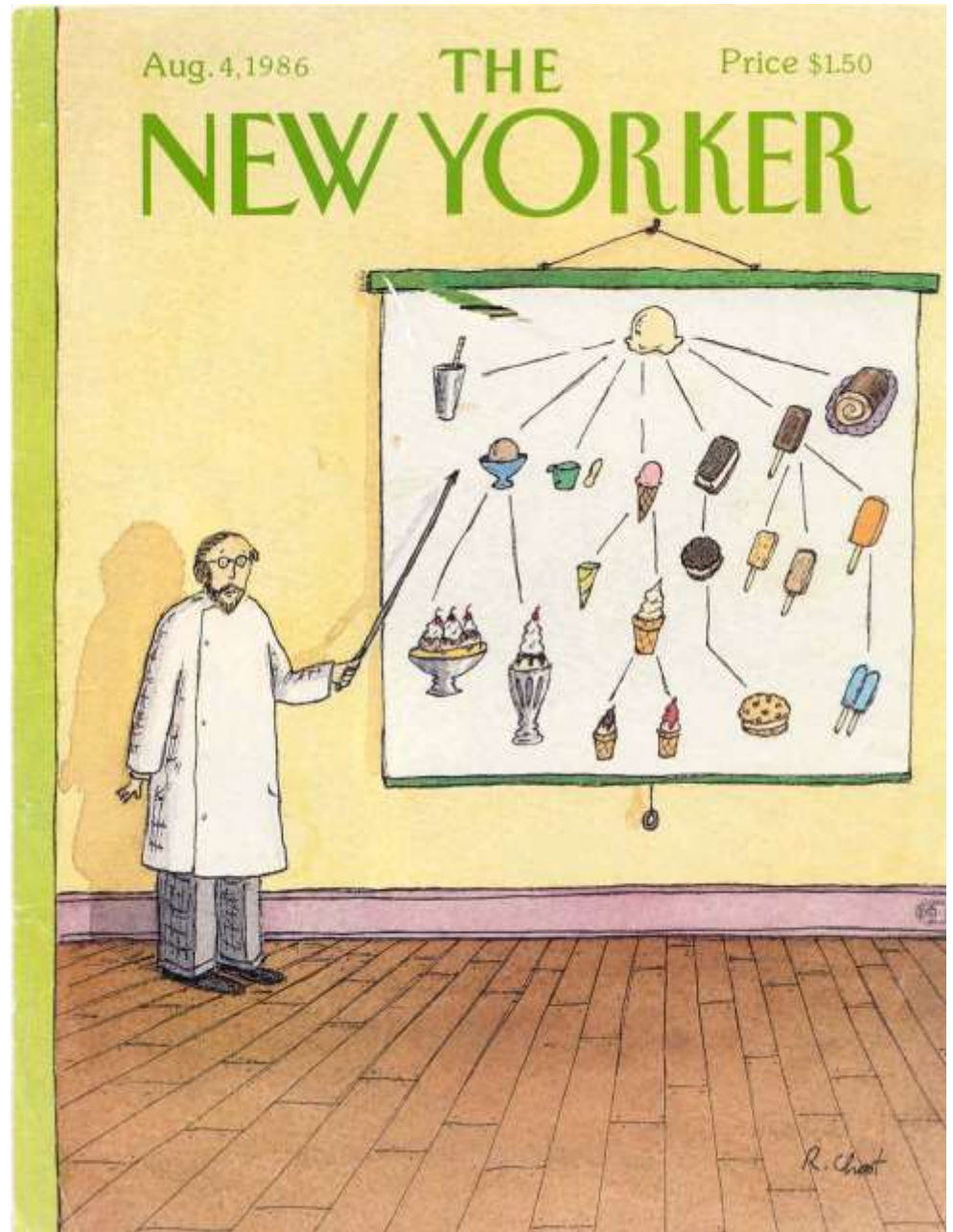
***“Did you enjoy this class session?”***

# Research philosophies

- **what kind of knowledge (ontology) are you generating in your research and how are you generating it (epistemology)**
- **what assumptions are you making about the world and the nature of reality (ontology), and the relationship between knowledge and the process by which it is developed (epistemology)**
- **what assumptions are you making about the knowledge production process and the extent to which any research or knowledge is value-free (axiology)**

# Ontology

Ontology concerns our assumptions about the nature of reality.

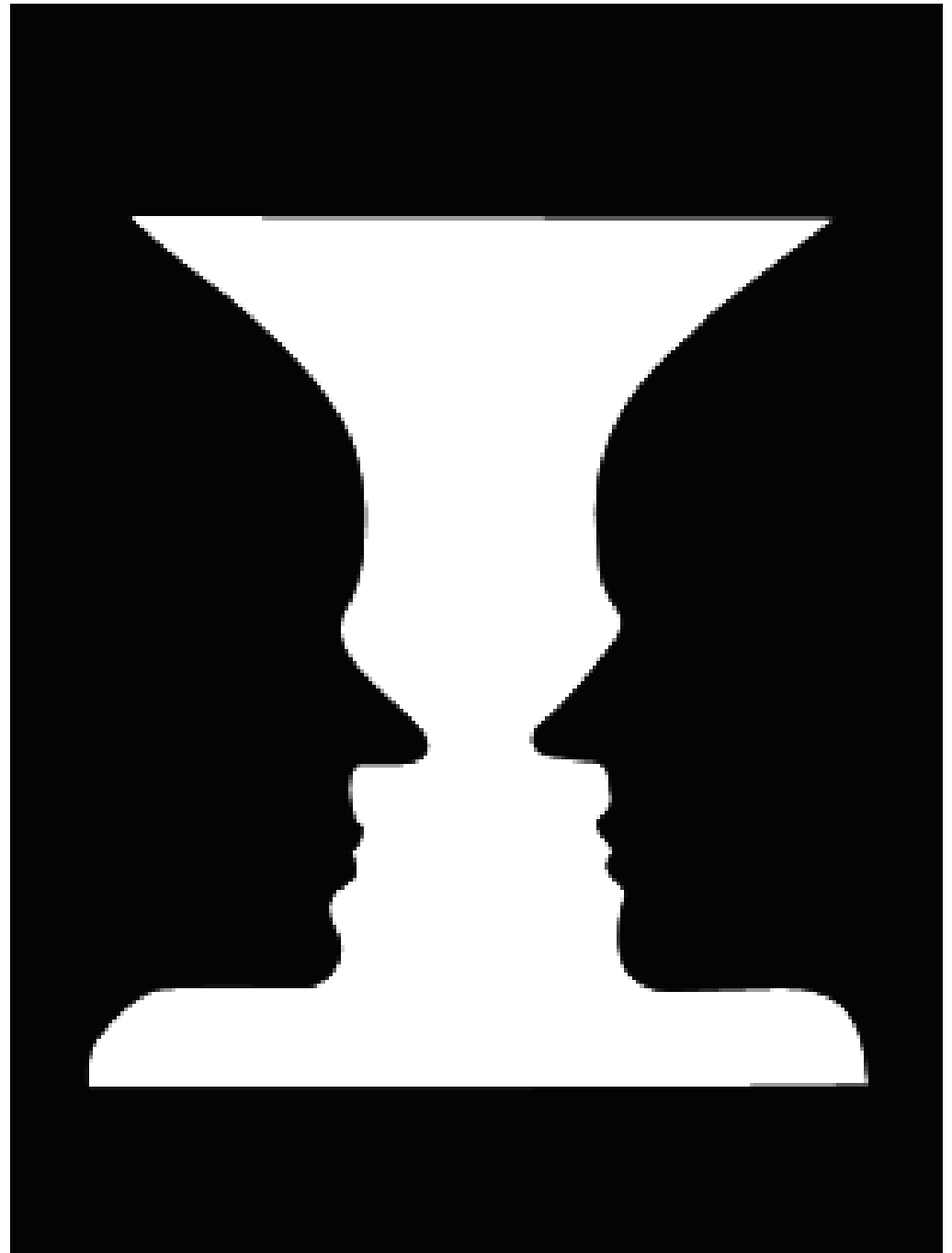


# Ontology

## Two main ontological positions

1. **objectivism/ realism:** the social world is objective, out there, independent of us who perceive it
2. **subjectivism/ idealism/ constructionism:** the social world is *constructed* by us - constructions are built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors

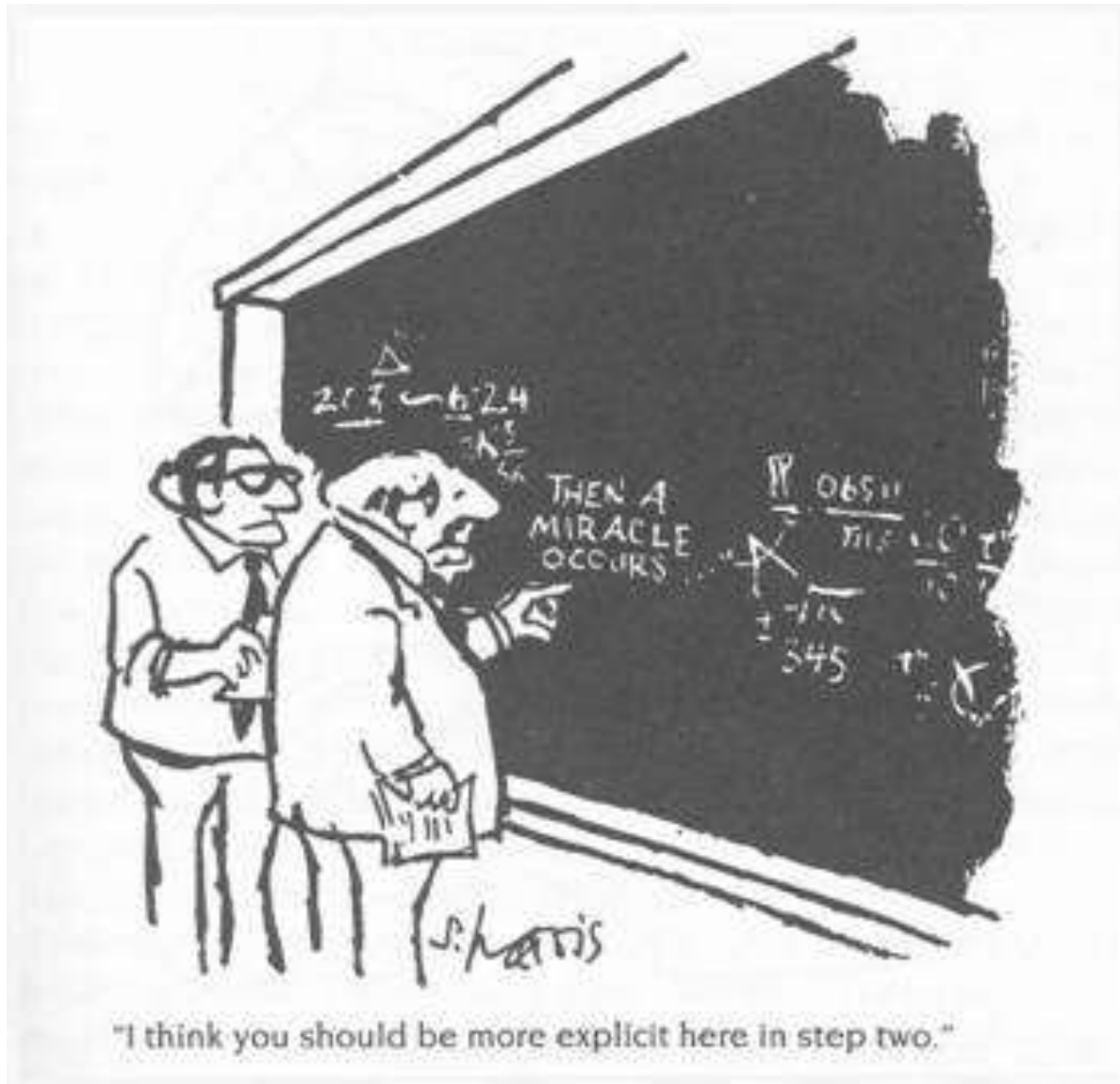
What can  
you see?





What can  
you see?

# Epistemology



**Epistemology  
means  
theory of  
knowledge,  
or how it is  
we can know  
anything  
about the  
world.**



# Positivism

*Positivism is the application of empiricist natural science to the study of society*

- **reality is unitary and can only be understood through the scientific approach**
- **research is conducted in a value-free way: the researcher is independent of the data that are collected**
- **the researcher is detached and neither influences nor is influenced by the research**

# Interpretivism

- **interpretivism argues that people and institutions are different from material objects and the natural world**
- **people are ‘social actors’ who interpret their everyday social roles in accordance with the meanings they give to these roles**
- **the goal of research is to understand the subjective meanings and reality of social actors in order to make sense of their motives, actions and intentions in a meaningful way**

# Axiology



**axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgements about values**

- ***how do values impact on research?***

# Values

**different views on the influence and role of values in research:**

- **strive for objectivity**
- **acknowledge your subjectivity through a 'reflexive' approach**

**reflexivity:** *recognise and acknowledge that research cannot be 'objective' and value-free; being self-reflective about how our values influence the research process and products*

# Research Philosophies

3 major ways of thinking about research philosophies

- **ontology**
  - **objectivism/realism**
  - **subjectivism/idealism/  
constructionism**
- **epistemology**
  - **positivism**
  - **interpretivism**
  - **pragmatism**
- **axiology**

# Research approaches

# Research approaches

- **this refers to the relationship between theory and data**
- **deductive approach: a theory and hypotheses are put forward and tested**
- **inductive approach: theory is developed as a result of collecting data**
- **deduction is often allied to positivism and induction to interpretivism although in practice this distinction is blurred**

## **Deduction emphasises**

- scientific principles
- moving from theory to data
- explaining causal relationships between variables
- collection of quantitative data
- applications of controls to ensure validity of data
- operationalisation of concepts to ensure clarity of definition
- highly structured approach
- researcher independence
- large samples to allow generalisation

## **Induction emphasises**

- understanding meanings human attach to events
- close understanding of the research context
- collection of qualitative data
- more flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as the research progresses
- realisation that the researcher is part of the research process
- less concern with the need to generalise



# Quantitative and qualitative research

- most obvious **difference** between the 2 approaches is that 1 quantifies (emphasis on numbers) and the other does not (emphasis on words)
- epistemological foundations: qualitative and quantitative approaches are often associated with **contrasting** positions on epistemology, ontology, and the connection between theory and data.

# Qualitative and quantitative research

	<b>Quantitative</b> (quantification)	<b>Qualitative</b> (words)
<b>Relationship between theory and data</b>	Deductive Testing of theory	Inductive Generation of theory
<b>Epistemology</b>	Natural science model Positivism	Interpretivism
<b>Ontology</b>	Objectivism	Constructionism/ Subjectivism

# Research design

# Research design

**Research design = general plan of how to answer research questions**

- 1. clearly define your research questions**
- 2. set out clear research objectives derived from your research questions**
- 3. specify data sources - consider constraints (access; time; location; money)**
- 4. consider ethical issues**

# Research Design

- **purpose of research**
- **research strategies**
  - **experiment**
  - **survey**
  - **case study**
  - **action research**
  - **grounded theory**
  - **ethnography**
  - **archival research**

- **research choices**
- **time horizons**
- **research credibility**

# The purpose of research

research tends to fall into 1 of the following categories:

- **explanatory**
- **descriptive**
- **exploratory**

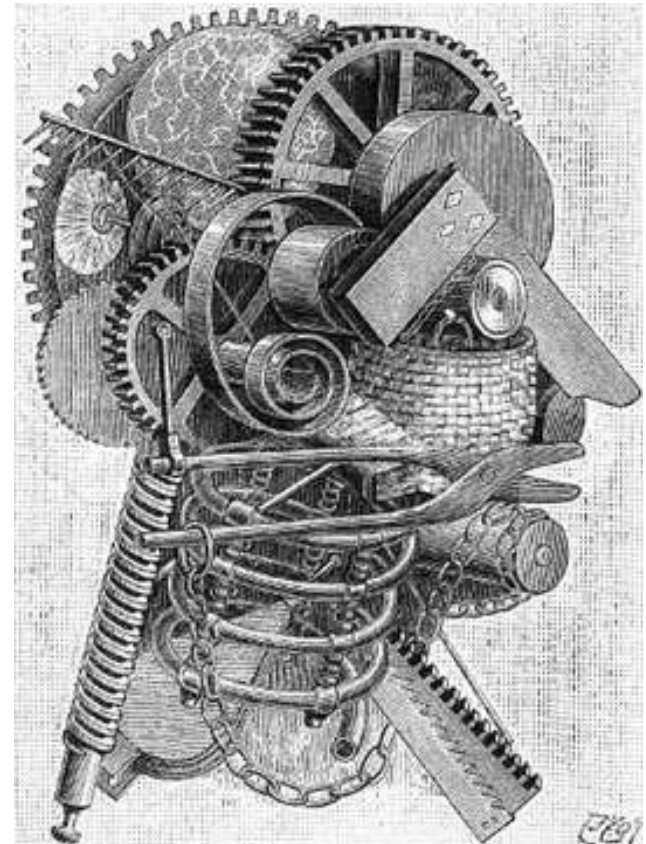


A piece of research can be more than 1 of these and can change over time

# Research strategies

Research strategies are different ways of gathering information or collecting data:

- experiment
- survey
- case study
- action research
- grounded theory
- ethnography
- archival research



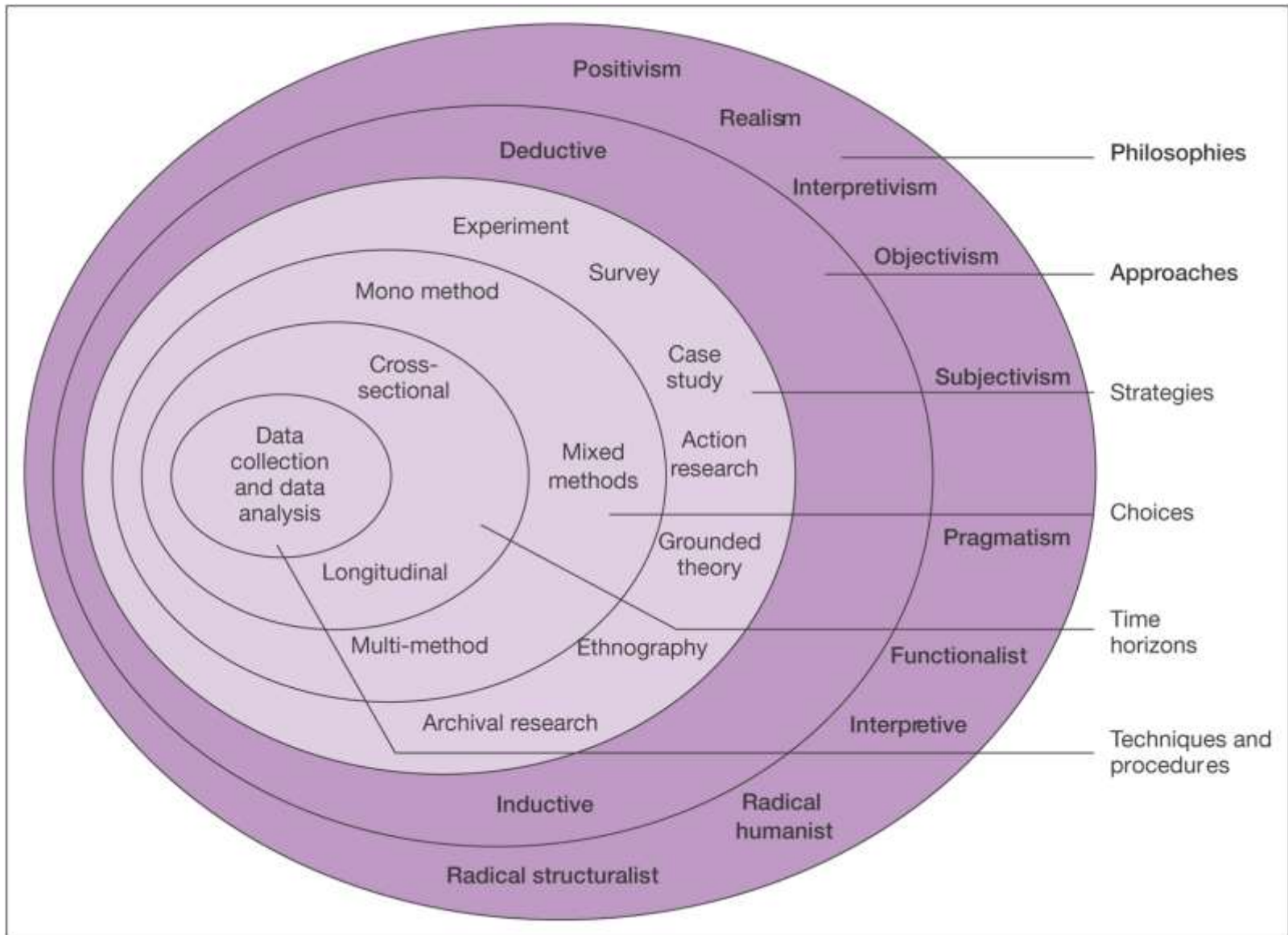


Figure 4.1 The research 'onion'

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# Summary

- **Research philosophies**
  - **Ontology/Epistemology**
  - **Objectivist/Subjectivist**
- **Research approaches**
  - **Deductive/Inductive**
  - **Quantitative/Qualitative**
- **Research design**
  - **Purpose**
  - **Strategies (methods)**

# Further reading

**Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015)**

***Research Methods for Business Students***

- **Chapter 4: Understanding research philosophies and approaches to theory development (pp. 122-161)**
- **Chapter 5: Formulating the research design (pp. 162-221)**