

Lecture 2

Research and Research Strategies

- 1. Social Science Method: Concepts, Theories and the 'Circuit of Knowledge'**
- 2. Research Strategies**



Research Strategies

- **When starting out research we need to decide on some kind of strategy or overall approach**
- **In social research a range of approaches are open to us. The choice of strategy depends on such things as:**
 - **Nature of the object being studied**
 - **Purpose of enquiry and questions we want answering**
 - **Practicality, cost and time**
 - **Methodological, political and ethical stances**

Research Strategies

- **Research strategies are overall approaches to research. They include experiments, surveys, case studies, action research & ethnography.**
 - **Strategies do not necessarily determine the methods used.**
 - **That said, strategies tend to be linked with different paradigms:**
 - **Experiments/surveys (naturalist/scientific)**
 - **Case studies – (anti-naturalist/ethnographic)**
 - **Action research- (critical theory)**
- Such approaches may well favour certain methods**

Experiments/Quasi experiments

- **Aim to test theories and identify cause**
- **Classic 'science' model - control, observation/measurement, replication**
- **Requires a closed system - to establish internal validity**
- **Uses treatment and control/comparison groups chosen by matched and random sampling.**
- **Tests pre and post intervention or treatment to ascertain change.**

Experiment/Quasi experiments

- **Closed systems impossible to produce in social world. Most social science settings use statistical control & adopt logic of the experimental method**
- **Threats to internal validity - history, maturation, statistical regression, selection bias**
- **Threats to external validity – Hawthorne effect, representativeness, operationalisation problems, context specific nature of behaviour**
- **These problems reflect bigger issues e.g. nature of human behaviour, models of cause, nature of measurement**

Surveys

- **Surveys aimed at breadth, provide a snapshot, rely on empirical data – to survey is to look**
- **Can be used longitudinally**
- **Tend to rely on sampling, measurement, statistics and quantitative analysis**
- **Surveys include postal questionnaires, face to face interviews, telephone interviews, observation, documentary surveys**

Surveys

- **Representativeness is crucial if surveys are to be generalised – hence need for random selection**
- **One off snapshot may tell us little about processes**
- **Can tend toward empiricism – view that measures or data simply reflect world out there. Raises complex issue of operationalising concepts and measurement**
- **Are detail, depth and contextual understanding sacrificed in search for breadth?**
- **Rely on correlations as cause but does this capture cause?**

Case Studies

- **A case study is a specific instance of the thing to be investigated – person, an organisation, a country.**
- **Tends to be descriptive and analytical – exploring specificity in depth - can be used to illustrate a general theory/principle or to test/generate theory**
- **Occurs in ‘natural settings’. Focuses on processes and relationships. Often uses multiple sources and methods**
- **Cases selected for suitability – typicality, extreme instance, test for theory, least likely instance, availability**

Case studies

- **How reliable and valid are case studies?**
- **Can case studies be generalised? How representative are cases?**
- **How do case studies link to wider processes e.g. effects of new health policy in a hospital – attitude of staff, style of implementation, etc?**
- **What should count as a case? The activities/processes in ‘bound’ areas like hospitals extend beyond the hospital (e.g. government policy impacts)**

Ethnography

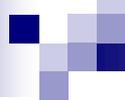
- **Essentially the study of peoples, groups, cultures**
- **Aim is to authentically capture the way in which those studied see and construct the world – usually this means joining the group/setting**
- **Meanings and social processes are crucial - capturing the world as it is seen, experienced and actually happens - understanding is the goal**
- **it is holistic, studying people, events and processes in context – direct observation and participation are its empirical base**

Ethnography

- **Its very difficult to do**
- **What effect does research have on setting – reactivity and going native**
- **Do ethnographers describe the real world or construct it. Is ethnography story telling?**
- **Are ethnographies unique? Can we generalise? How reliable and valid are they**
- **Can ethnographies be linked to theory and used to explain?**

Action Research

- Attempts to bridge a gap between theory/practice so research impacts on/improves practice
- Research is not 'done' on others but involves researching ones own work - it is participatory
- AR is collaborative involving those responsible for action in improving it
- Establishes self-critical communities participating and collaborating in all phases of research
- Systematic learning process - ideas, assumptions, practices tested by gathering evidence in practice – plan, act, observe reflect

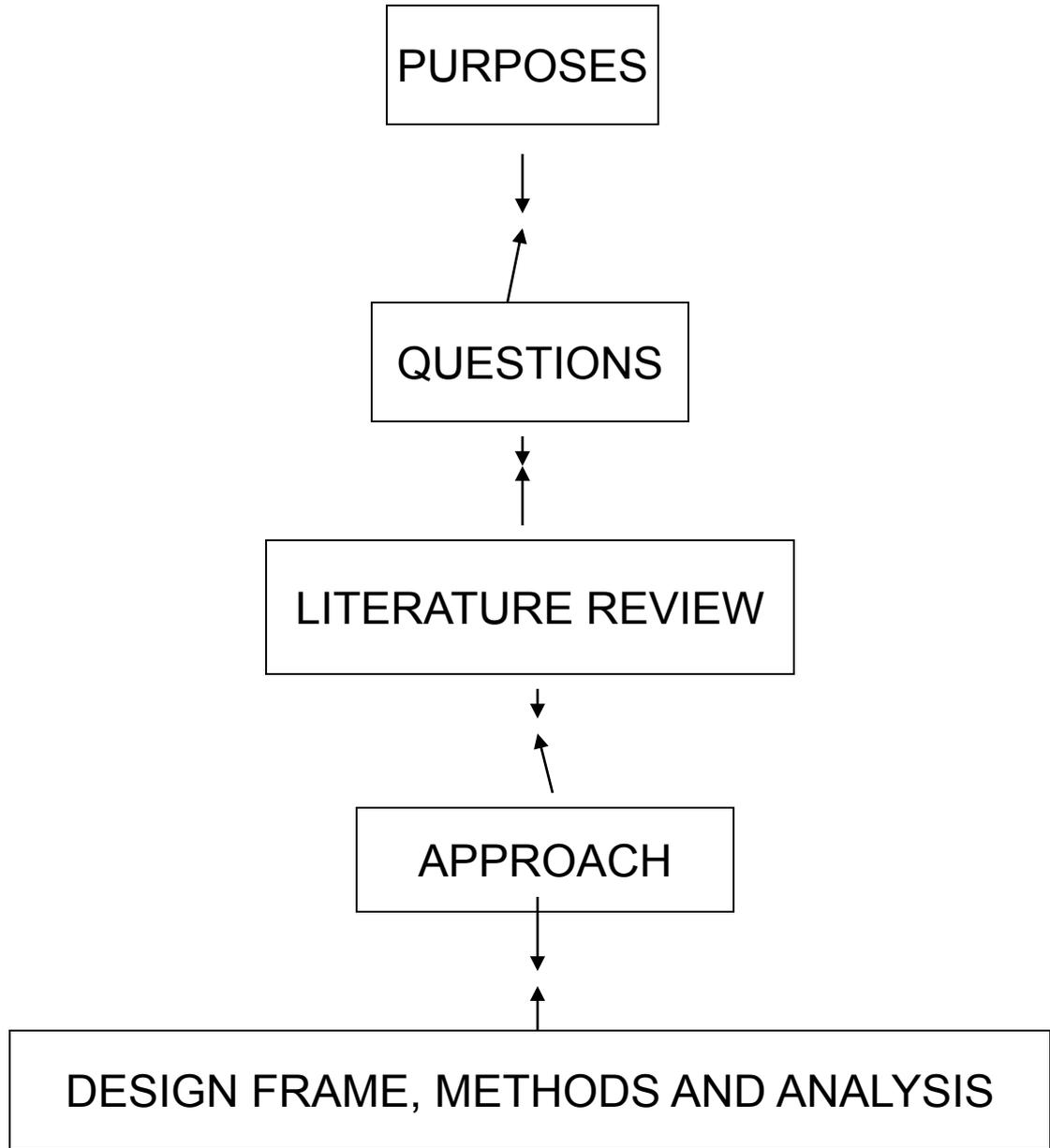


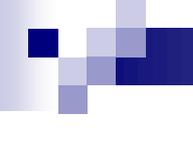
Action Research

- **Can you fulfil two roles at same time? Clash of interest – does AR produce self serving results?**
- **Researcher as practitioner limits scale and just how much research findings can be generalised**
- **How rigorous is the research process?**
- **Is it a political or research strategy?**
- **Is there a tension between AR as improving practice, AR as critical/emancipatory**

Ethics

- Arise at all stages of research
- Choice of subject, purpose, practice, outcomes, use
- Each strategy poses generic and specific ethical issues
- Issues to consider:
 - deception
 - trust
 - confidentiality/anonymity,
 - privacy,
 - role,
 - Purpose





“There are known knowns. There are things that we “ know we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know we don’t know. So when we do the best we can and we pull all this information together and, and we then say well that’s basically what we see as the situation that is really only the known knowns and the known unknowns, and each year we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns and and I, I ... it, it sounds like a riddle ... “

*(Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary for Defense, United States of America
Department of Defense news briefing, 12
February 2002)*