1. Introduction

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In any research project, there is a hierarchy of objectives, the first and foremost of which relates to the purpose of the research in terms of expanding knowledge about a social phenomenon. Then the research methodology is the instrument through which the research objective is fulfilled. The objective of the research methodology, whatever the objective of the research, is to achieve high quality information, that is data, which are free from bias in relation to the social phenomenon under investigation (Wass and Wells, 1993, p. 91).

INTRODUCTION

Enterprise research incorporating entrepreneurship and small business is gaining an elevated standing within universities, reflecting the recognition small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have garnered as a critical sector in national economies. This standing is reflected in the call for papers for the Academy of Management Learning and Education Journal special edition on Entrepreneurship which remarked:

Entrepreneurship education has been the testing ground for many important techniques in business education. Today virtually every university offers some sort of entrepreneurship course or program. In addition, entrepreneurship is a field that generates strong interest and intrigues practitioners and policy makers at many levels and in many countries. Entrepreneurship education has been touted as a “cure” for economic and social ills and proposed as a part of curriculum for students at all ages and levels (*Call for Papers*, Special Issue of AMLE on Entrepreneurship Education, 2002).

Correspondingly, research encapsulated under the title of enterprise research has taken enormous strides forward in the last two decades. Yet the research frontier is still wide and can be served by encouraging research designs and methodologies as diverse as the content to be covered. The title of this book is deliberately broad to permit an inclusive approach to the diverse content and research processes desired.

RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

Enterprise research, whether it be small business, entrepreneurship, or innovation, could not be regarded as a cohesive discipline as yet. As research disciplines gain the attention of researchers and the public, more research studies are conducted in ever narrowing areas of interest, with increasingly standardized research techniques. Enterprise research has the advantage of sufficient immaturity as a research discipline to still permit a wide scope for new and innovative research studies to probe under-explored concepts. It also means that researchers are not channelled down the well-worn ruts of research methodology, enabling them to select from a plethora of research methods and techniques. Delving into this unexplored terrain requires exploratory research methods supported by inductive research techniques.

From this inductive, interpretist approach to research has emanated a rich diversity of innovative research techniques. Unfortunately, this diversity can be problematic for the researcher seeking an interpretist perspective. The rationale for the development of this book is to provide a sample of these diverse but valuable techniques in a cohesive form. The cohesiveness is underwritten by a thematic approach to the book that pervades each chapter. The theme is the necessity of inductive/interpretist/humanist approaches to the research of enterprises, to match the individualism and uniqueness of the people and businesses being researched. The book encourages the maintenance of diversity in the research agenda as it matures to ensure innovation and entrepreneurship are not simply the content focus of the research, but that researchers can feel that they themselves can be entrepreneurial and innovative in their research agenda.

THE PURPOSE AND FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

This book has been developed to meet the needs of researchers in the broad field of enterprise research. This ranges from venture creation and firm formation, to small business management, to the study of individual entrepreneurs to innovation and entrepreneurship. An important area of endeavour such as this requires methodological developments which offer rigour and choice for those researching in the area. The unit of analysis may vary widely between the project, the business unit, the individual, the firm, its market or industry, even nations and across nations. As this realm of research endeavour ever expands we need to ensure that the range of methodological techniques available do not hinder its growth and development, and are themselves as innovative as the phenomenon under scrutiny.

The content of this book is international in its appeal and its substance. Contributors from Sweden, Denmark, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Finland, Hong Kong, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, England and Canada bring with them their own cultural and philosophical perspectives, which ensure expansive views and experience of enterprise research. This is matched by a rich diversity of topics and techniques supported by case examples from the researchers' own experiential discoveries.

Specific chapters will hold value for enterprise researchers and research students, academic institutions and libraries, undergraduate and post-graduate courses on research methods, enterprise advisors and consultants. Overall, the book will provide researchers and research students, with a cohesive body of material on the use of interpretist research techniques in all areas of enterprise research, including small business, entrepreneurship and innovation. It is hoped that the book will provide a major contribution as both a text in research methods programs and as a central reference guide for the increasing number of enterprise researchers, as it provides a distinct body of knowledge in an important and emerging research agenda, which to this point has been disparate.

The diversity of the methodologies described in the book is enhanced by the international flavour of the authorship of each chapter. This book is not, however, proposed to be simply a collection of selected readings with no definable direction or purpose. This book has a clear theme running through sections and chapters chapter authors did not simply contribute pre-existing readings.

WHERE THE MATERIAL IN THIS BOOK SITS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH PARADIGMS

At the outset it is important to clarify that this book focuses not on ontological or epistemological concerns, as important to research and understanding as these are. The focus of the book is squarely on selected methodologies, while maintaining a post-positivist stance. To clarify, ontology is the fundamental assumptions made about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991); epistemology concentrates on the relationship between reality and the researcher; and methodology outlines the available research tools and techniques to conduct the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In this book we do not seek to question the fundamental belief systems upon which researchers base their research decisions. We seek to offer, rather than prescribe, alternative methodological techniques which have already been applied in research projects conducted by the chapter authors.

As you read through the chapters of this book, you will see that the research paradigms of critical theory, constructivism and realism are all tackled, and corresponding methodologies outlined and exemplified. The only paradigm which is not extensively incorporated into the text of this book is that of positivism. There are numerous reasons for this however, the fundamental reason is that enterprise research is an emerging area. As a content area it is focused upon innovation, change and dynamism. A positivist approach has limited value in the theory building desires of researchers in this realm. Table 1.1 below provides summary clarification of the stances which can be taken. Our focus in this book is on the methodological assumptions under critical theory, constructivism and realism as applied to enterprise research.

Positivism considers that reality in natural and social sciences is composed of discrete variables that can be quantified, measured and classified (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Researchers observe, collect, measure and

Table 1.1 Philosophies underpinning research paradigms

Philosophical Assumptions	Research Paradigms			
	Positivism	Critical Theory	Constructivism	Realism
Ontology	Reality exists driven by natural mechanisms. Discrete variables can be measured	Reality is shaped by social, ethnic, economic, political and other forces over time	Reality is constructed by people based on beliefs, feelings and experiences	Reality is imperfectly understood because of human mental limitations
Epistemology	Researcher is remote from reality	Researcher is involved with those being researched	Researcher is a passionate participant	Mutual interaction between researcher and interviewee
Methodology	Experiments and surveys. Mainly quantitative methods	Action research. Researcher is transformative, changing the participant's social world	In-depth interviews. Individual beliefs, feelings and views sought	Case studies. Convergent interviewing. Interpretation by qualitative and/or quantitative methods

Source: Adapted from Chew, 2002; Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999, p. 91; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991, p. 90; Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 89; and Huberman and Miles, 2002.

classify data on the variables (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). The positivism paradigm does not fit with the research problem in many areas of enterprise research because there is relatively little previous research in many areas and theory testing would be difficult, as constructs have not yet been established.

A good proportion of the material in this book involves not only inductive, interpretist approaches, rather than hypothetico-deductive research, it is also qualitative research. According to Sarantakos (1993, p. 32) there are three dominant paradigms in the social sciences: positivistic, interpretist and critical. Sarantakos believes the positivist and non-positivist (interpretive and critical) to be considered incompatible, the critical and interpretive paradigms not. For the purposes of this book and of good research, these major paradigms are not considered to be incompatible.

It is important at this point to define the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, while remembering that these two approaches are not necessarily the two extremes of a philosophical continuum. Reichardt and Cook (1979, pp. 9–10), provide a sound juxtaposition of the two approaches:

the quantitative paradigm is said to have a positivistic, hypothetico-deductive, particularist, objective, outcome oriented and natural science world view. In contrast, the qualitative paradigm is said to prescribe to a phenomenological, inductive, holistic, subjective, process oriented and social anthropological world view.

Romano (1989) supports this approach: 'If qualitative data is collected in a structured manner it can be used to produce measures which can be tested by quantitative scales. This approach will give better guidance in collecting and analysing the data'.

Inductive research is necessary in the exploratory phase of research as the empirical literature is generally insufficient to permit a deductive approach. The quantitative paradigm is implemented in at a more mature phase of the research field. It is then appropriate to utilize the quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach to test and confirm results, findings and theory.

In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research:

considers words rather than numbers as the major element of data; tends to be more inductive than deductive, emphasising theory building rather than hypothesis testing; that is, it aims at internal validity through information richness, coherence and insight from triangulated sources rather than external validity from statistical measures of generalisability; tends to use data within its context; that is, from the field rather than from experiments in the laboratory; includes subjective information collected from interviews, rather than concentrating only on objective, value free data tends to pay more attention to particulars while also being more broadly focused (Perry and Coote, 1994, p. 103).

Parkhe (1993) explicitly endorses the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches by suggesting that:

‘there is no competition (between quantitative and qualitative approaches), but rather an essential continuity and inseparability between inductive and deductive approaches to theory development. Bougeois (1979) correctly pointed to the complementarity between induction and deduction, insisting that the process must continually weave back and forth between them’.

CONCLUSION

As you will see as you read on, the diversity of methodologies explored throughout this book is substantial. The range of study content and context is no less so. Yet, the purpose and focus of this book remains on the methodologies.

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