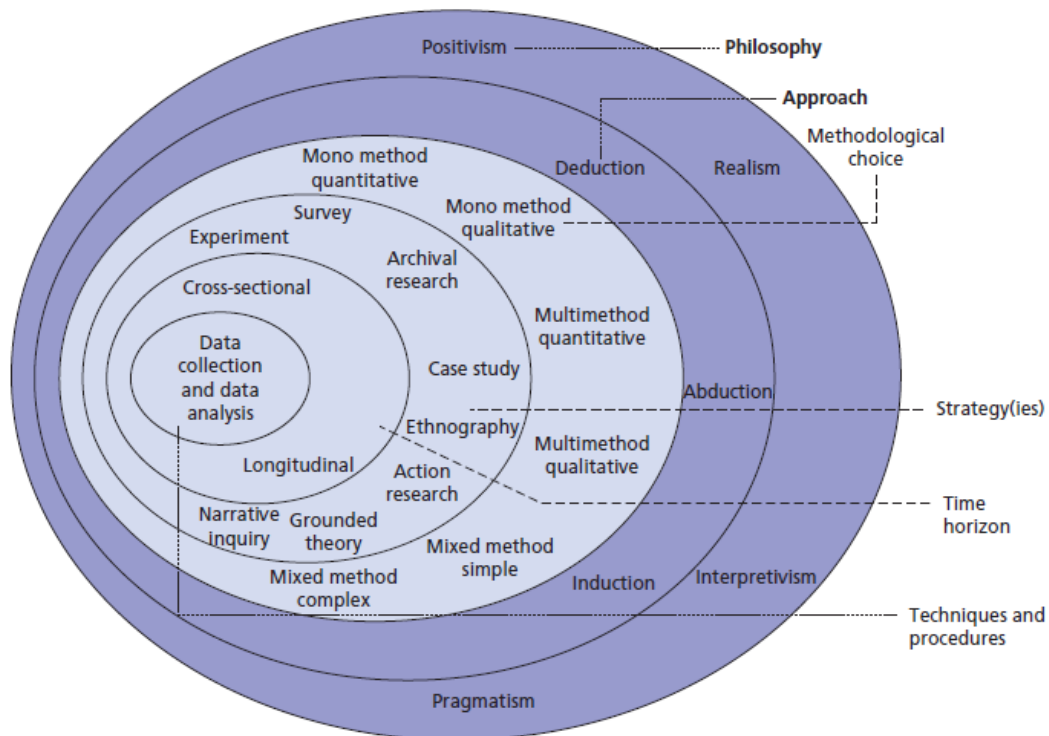# The Essence of Research Philosophy

Research philosophy deals with the source, nature and development of knowledge[1]. Although the idea of knowledge creation may appear to be profound, you are engaged in knowledge creation as part of completing your dissertation. You will collect secondary and primary data and engage in data analysis to answer the research question and this answer marks the creation of new knowledge.

In essence, addressing research philosophy in your dissertation involves being aware and formulating your beliefs and assumptions. As it is illustrated in Figure below, the identification of the research philosophy is positioned at the outer layer of the 'research onion', accordingly it is the first topic to be clarified in research methodology chapter of your dissertation.

Research philosophy in the 'research onion' [2]

Each stage of the research process is based on assumptions about the sources and the nature of knowledge.

The philosophy of a study will reflect the author's important assumptions and these assumptions serve as base for the research strategy. Generally, research philosophy has many branches related to a wide range of disciplines. Within the scope of business studies in particular there are four main research philosophies:

1. Pragmatism
2. Positivism
3. Realism
4. Interpretivism (Interpretivist)/Constructivism (Constructivist)

The Choice of Research Philosophy

The choice of a specific philosophy for a research is impacted by practical implications. There are important philosophical differences between studies that focus on facts and numbers such as an analysis of the impact of foreign direct investment on the level of GDP growth and qualitative studies such as an analysis of leadership style on employee motivation in organizations.

The choice between positivist and interpretivist research philosophies or between quantitative and qualitative research methods has traditionally represented a major point of debate. However, the latest developments in the practice of conducting studies has increased the popularity of pragmatism and realism philosophies as well.

Moreover, as it is illustrated in table below, there are popular data collection methods associated with each research philosophy.

	Pragmatism	*Positivism*	*Realism*	*Interpretivism*
Popular data collection method(s)	Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative	Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative, but can use qualitative	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, quantitative or qualitative	Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative

Research philosophies and data collection methods [3]

[1] Bajpai, N. (2011) "Business Research Methods" Pearson Education India

[2] Source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited

[3] Table adapted from Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited