Social Science Research and Philosophical Alignments

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Abstract: Over time, the study of social science has focused on how people interact with their surroundings. Research in the social sciences is frequently based on valid ontological and epistemological viewpoints. The primary principle that guides social science research was covered in-depth in this study. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap between philosophical alignment and social scientific research in the literature. This paper included a thorough discussion of the six (6) main movements in research philosophy: positivism, interpretivism, idealism, realism, pragmatism, and empiricism. It was said that research for pragmatists begins with a problem and seeks to give useful solutions that guide present practice. Additionally, it was mentioned that all strategies, procedures, and tools used in the social research process should be self-validated and that the philosophical basis for each one determines if they are efficient or effective. It was determined that knowledge of philosophical issues and research methods is very helpful because it enables the researcher to make a more informed choice about the research design, it can help the researcher understand which designs will work and, more importantly, which will not, and knowledge of various research traditions enables the researcher to adapt research designs in accordance with the limitations of various knowledge structures.

Keywords: Positivism, Interpretivism, Idealisms, Realism, Pragmatism and Empiricism.

INTRODUCTION

Man is naturally curious and strives to learn as much as he can about the world he lives in. A careful examination of the phenomenon we are interested in is frequently the result of this curiosity in the scientific community. As a result, social curiosity has been a defining feature of human existence and is the foundation for knowledge creation and accumulation (Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016). As a result, research takes centre stage in man's social life as he tries to understand the nature of the universe in which he lives and makes an effort to explain phenomena, give things meaning, and comprehend reality. Various social science experts have been on an ongoing search for accurate and trustworthy knowledge over the years. This explains why research is so important to the development of knowledge across all fields. The generation of accurate information in the behavioural sciences is severely constrained by the givens of nature, but in the natural sciences these serve to streamline and potentially remove investigator biases. The polarization of paradigms present in the behavioural sciences, which are fluid in nature, makes it difficult to describe occurrences in the social cosmos (Eketu, 2018). Holden and Lynch (2004) assert that philosophy, which arose in the context of human conceptions about the social world, was the philosophical basis from which the social sciences were nurtured. A researcher's way of thinking that leads to the discovery of fresh, trustworthy information on the subject of their research is called their research philosophy. In other words, it serves as the foundation for the research, which entails selecting a method, defining the issue, and gathering, processing, and analyzing the necessary data. Furthermore, Holden and Lynch (2004) argued that the choice of methodology should be connected to the researcher's philosophical stance and the social science issue under study. Social scientists research a wide range of intricate phenomena, from census data obtained from tens of thousands of people to the in-depth study of one person's social life; from seeing what is happening on a street today to the historical examination of what occurred hundreds of years ago. Different research procedures, which can be broadly split into quantitative and qualitative research approaches, are used by social science researchers to describe, explore, and understand various social phenomena (Tuli, 2010). A researcher must be concerned with a variety of philosophical issues related to why, what, and how to conduct research. This is due to the fact that a researcher must be able to persuade an audience that something worthwhile has been added to the body of knowledge as a result of their research efforts. The audience of the researcher, which may consist of sponsors, coworkers, or examiners, is frequently very critical. Sound responses to the why, what, and how of research depend on the philosophy that guides the research process (Remenyi, 1997). According to some, social science research should be grounded in the proper ontological and epistemological frameworks (Saunders et al., 2009). Additionally, Johnson and Clark (2006) expressly argued that business and management researchers need to be aware of the research philosophical perspectives that influence their research strategy because this shapes the topic and methodology. In light of this, this study discusses numerous research philosophies and how they relate to social science research.
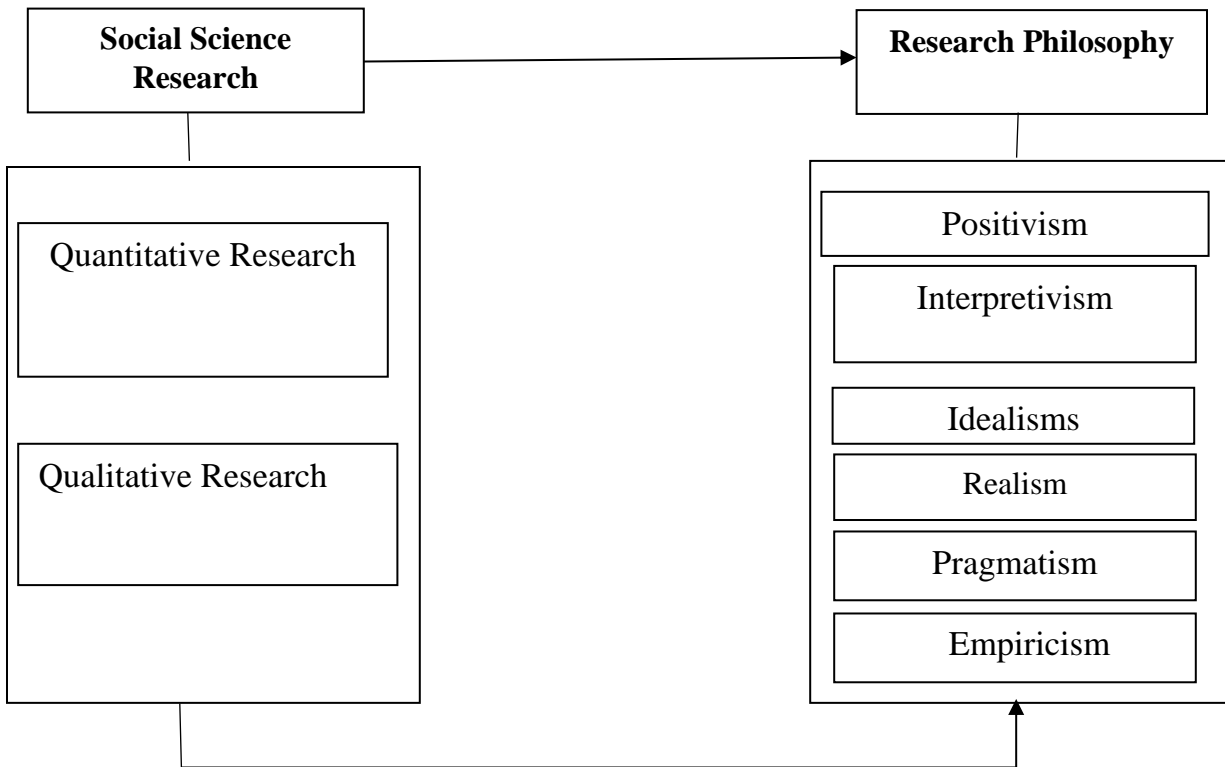
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Showing the dimensions of social science research and the various research philosophy.

Sources: Adopted from Neuman (2003) and Uddin and Hamiduzzaman (2009).

Social Science Research

There are two types of social science research: quantitative and qualitative. According to Tuli (2010), quantitative research is concerned with efforts to quantify social phenomena, gather and evaluate numerical data, and concentrate on the linkages among a limited number of attributes across numerous examples. Comparatively, linkages between a greater number of attributes across a smaller number of cases are the main emphasis of qualitative research, which is more interested in understanding the meaning of social occurrences. The systematic research that social scientists do in order to understand the attitudes, beliefs, classifications, values, and perceptions of society is known as social inquiry or social research (Ragin, 1994; Musthafa, 2014). It is a systematic approach that entails looking at social phenomena, concepts, and constructs. Social research, as defined by Wood (2013), is the process of acquiring data via questionnaires, observations, observations of people, interviews, and examination of socially significant issues. By using legitimate paradigms and procedures, the aim of social research is to reach valid, trustworthy, or reliable findings regarding phenomena. Researchers tend to favor whatever technique they think appropriate depending on their philosophical biases because social reality may be described and comprehended from a variety of perspectives. Commonly known as the quantitative research approach, pure "Nomothetic" positivist research. The physical and biological sciences typically use this strategy. The emphasis is typically on evaluating theories with rigorous statistical methods. The data, which are typically gathered through the use of well-designed, validated, and consistently applied research instruments, are typically presented as figures. The researcher must be comfortable working with numbers and statistical techniques in order to apply this approach. Right now, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) makes life much simpler for the researcher who chooses to use this methodology (Ahiauzu&Asawo, 2016).

The "Ideographic" The term "qualitative research approach" is typically used to describe anti-positivist research. The focus of this strategy, according to Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016), is on naturally occurring circumstances, or the contacts that people have during the regular course of events. On the other hand, it is believed that the positivist method offers "idealized" descriptions of attitudes and behaviour, which, since they are generalizations, can have an ambiguous relationship to real relational situations.

Concept of Research Philosophy

A significant change has occurred in the last ten years. Not only in the more precise fields like economics, social statistics, and experimental psychology, but also generally across the social scientific disciplines, philosophy of the social sciences has grown to be a thriving field with intriguing research on a variety of themes (Cartwright &Montuschi, 2014). Research paradigms are firmly ingrained in scientific philosophies. The "core worldview or underlying belief system that informs the investigation's methodological decisions as well as its ontological and epistemological foundations" is known as the research paradigm (Guba& Lincoln, 1994). Research philosophy is the process of developing a research hypothesis, along with its knowledge and nature (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Although the assumption is seen as a tentative statement of reasoning, it is actually based on the knowledge and insights that the philosophizing person has gained via intellectual endeavor. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), assumptions are the foundation of research. This implies that many researchers may hold various presumptions regarding the nature of truth and knowledge as well as how they are acquired. Numerous philosophical concerns are raised by the problem of how to study the social environment. Some of them have to do with "ontology" what is the character of the social world and what can be learned about it? Others deal with "epistemology," which asks how we may learn about the social world and what constitutes the foundation of our knowledge. The term "research philosophy" refers to the implicit or explicit epistemological, ontological, and axiological presumptions and undertakings that direct an investigation in a research study. Epistemology, in general, explains "how" a researcher comes to know the truth and makes assumptions about how information should be acquired and accepted. The ontology defines knowledge and makes assumptions about how the world works. The value system's underlying assumptions are exposed via axiology. The formulation of research philosophy is complemented by these epistemological endeavours, ontological presumptions, and axiological objectives regarding the nature of the world, which has an impact on the choice of the best research methodology and methodologies (Pathirage, Amaratunga& Haigh, 2007). When used, the scientific research philosophy is a technique that enables scientists to transform their theories into knowledge during study. The positivist research philosophy, interpretivist research philosophy, pragmatic research philosophy, and realistic research philosophy are the four main themes of research philosophy that are distinguished and covered by many authors (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002). Research Philosophy refers to the researcher's guiding beliefs regarding the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002). According to Uddin and Hamiduzzaman (2009), some of the most important social science philosophies include Positivism, Interpretivism, Idealisms, Realism, Pragmatism and Empiricism.

Positivism

Positivism is a natural scientist's philosophical perspective that calls for using observed social reality to generate generalizations that resemble laws. The positivist approach places a strong emphasis on scientific empiricist methodology intended to produce accurate data and information free from bias or human interpretation (Saunders, 2015). Positivism favours using scientific approaches to investigate social reality. Two significant and essentially at odds intellectual traditions have tended to dominate the social and management sciences over the past 200 years, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979). This first tradition is typically referred to as "sociological positivism." This essentially reflects an effort to use tools and models from the natural sciences to investigate human issues. It takes a "realist" stance toward ontology and treats the social world as though it were the natural world. A "positivist" epistemology, largely "deterministic" conceptions of human nature, and the application of "nomothetic" techniques support this. According to Haralambos and Heald (1980), the positivists' emphasis on verifiable facts stems largely from their conviction that human behavior can be explained in a manner similar to how matter behaves. As a result, positivism's ontological perspective holds that the cosmos is made up of unchangeable, objectively given things and structures (Hirschheim, 1987). Positivists contend that reality can be objectively discovered and exists apart from social actors who are interested in it (Bryman& Bell, 2015). The positivists use the natural sciences' empiricism to investigate the social world. They contend that their conclusions can be verified and offer a more trustworthy and legitimate explanation of social occurrences. Positivism is the belief that all philosophical inquiry, including that of the social sciences, must carefully follow the procedures of the natural sciences (Heywood, 2000). According to the positivist school of thought, science has the monopoly on knowledge and is the only field in which knowledge can be said to be truly authentic. According to positivism, knowledge can only be obtained by rigorously testing theories, avoiding metaphysical speculation. According to positivism, social science attempts to understand the external world in predictive and explanatory ways. To do this, the researcher must develop theories that are made up of extremely generic statements that represent the regular relationships. In particular, Bacon and Descartes stand out as highly specialized individuals. In contrast to the previous approach of medieval scholasticism, Bacon argued for the value of experience, experiment, induction, and painstaking observation as the means of establishing a reliable basis for scientific ideas. Descartes, on the other hand, placed his faith in the mathematical certainties as the primary instrument of scientific knowledge (Hughes, 1987). According to the positivism school of thought or epistemological position, the social world can be studied using the scientific approach of natural science. Auguste Comte created the positivist epistemological school of thought (Debele, 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2003), the positivist views the world objectively and rests his or her understanding on visible social reality. Grix (2002) asserted that positivism favors the application of methodology from the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond when evaluating its epistemological viewpoint. The general tenet of positivism is that there is no distinction between the topics covered by the social sciences and those covered by the natural sciences.

Interpretivism

Approaches that place a strong focus on the significance of people's personalities and involvement in both social and cultural life are known as interpretivist (Elster, 2007). Its roots are in the philosophical schools of hermeneutics and phenomenology, and Max Weber, a German sociologist, is generally recognized as having had the greatest effect. Interpretivists investigate the intentions and meanings behind people's activities, such as their social interactions and behaviour (Eliaeson, 2002). According to the interpretivist school of thought, also referred to as metaphysical idealism, reality is a social actor's subjective artifact and cannot exist independently of people's value systems, such as perceptions, qualities, and so on (Lee & Lings, 2008). According to an ontology known as interpretivism, social reality is the result of social actors negotiating the significance of their own and other people's acts and circumstances. This nominalist ontology sees human experience as an interpretive process rather than a sensory reception and comprehension of the outside, material world. According to nominalists, human behaviour is influenced by how people perceive the circumstances in which they find themselves. However, interpretivist scholars also examine the precise methods in which a causal link manifests itself as well as the context in which it occurs, according to Lin (1998). These researchers can therefore go beyond what has already happened to understand how it has transpired (Elster, 2007). There is no objective knowledge that is separate from thinking, reasoning humans, according to Eisenhardt's (1989) argument that interpretivists' assumption that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation proves this. By its very nature, interpretivism supports the importance of qualitative data in the search for knowledge (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

Idealisms

There are two ways to define idealism: metaphysical and political. Metaphysical idealism is the view that, in the end, only concepts exist (Heywood; 2000:91-92). Idealism involves an ontology in which social reality is the result of social actors negotiating the significance of and for actions and circumstances. Social reality is pre-interpreted in the sense of idealism. Knowledge is derived from commonplace conceptions and meanings according to its epistemology. The goal of the social researcher is to collect socially produced meanings from the everyday social world and then reconstruct these meanings using scientific knowledge. It contends that meaning derives not from the external social world but rather from knowing subjects who are interested in understanding the significance of social existence through the positioning of individuals in particular contexts. It has also come under fire in a number of other ways, such how the fundamental ideas of idealism have the potential to be deceptive because capable social players are constantly checking the reasons. Idealism is unable to address the conditions that give rise to meaning, interpretations, actions, norms, and beliefs, as well as the significance of institutional structures, particularly division of interests and power relations (Uddin &Hamiduzzaman, 2009). Idealism holds that common sense conceptions and meanings are the source of all knowledge. To understand the socially produced meaning, the social researcher is thought to enter ordinary society. This allows him to reconstruct his own universe. Many of the tenets of positivism are rejected by idealism as a philosophy of social science (Haralambos and Heald, 1980; Gill and Johnson, 1991; Saunder et al, 2003). Subjectivist proponents of idealism contend that the social and natural sciences deal with fundamentally separate topics. As a result, they disagree with the idea that the social sciences may effectively utilize the concepts and procedures of the natural sciences. Haralambos asserts that, in contrast to matter, man has consciousness, including ideas, feelings, meanings, intentions, and a sense of self in order to support the idealists' point of view. Because of this, his behaviour has significance. Bryman and Bell (2003) distinguished this philosophy from positivism by stating that in contrast to positivism, which seeks to explain human behaviour, idealism seeks to comprehend it. Idealism bases its view of human nature on the voluntarist tenet. Idealists contend that because people are fully autonomous, they build their own environments. Humans are thought to actively participate in building and reconstructing the world around them and give things meaning. This is a direct result of idealists believing that the only way to comprehend the social reality is from the perspective of the people who actively participate in the social order.

Realism

A social science perspective known as realism positions itself as the primary indicator of world politics. Because of its ontology, social science presumes that the ultimate objects of inquiry such as society, the state, one's own self, etc. exist and function irrespective of social scientists and their endeavours. The social reality is divided into three categories: the empirical observations, which are made up of experiences and events through observation; the real events, which happen whether or not they are observed; and the reality, which consists of the current processes, powers, and causal mechanisms that produce events. Theories and social research can be developed based on the real world by using ontology of intransitive structures and procedures. From an epistemological perspective, reality is built on the construction of models of such mechanisms, which both expose the reality's underlying process and serve as hypothetical descriptions. A socially built world can be seen as social reality, where social actors create social aspects or where material relational systems create social arrangements. The primary aspects of realism are: constructive realism; entity realism; aesthetic realism; scientific realism; moderate realism; modal realism; mystical realism; organic realism and philosophical realism. Neorealism, often known as "new" or structural realism, is a modification of classical realism that favours the structure of international systems as a means of explaining events as opposed to the objectives and characteristics of individual governments (Heywood; 2000). Although critical realism highlights the inclinations of things to occur in opposition to regular

patterns of events, it nonetheless holds to the idea that reality exists irrespective of observers. Realists believe that universal truths, constant conjunctions, or predictable patterns of events serve as symbols for the ordered universe. Therefore, the reasons of human behaviour are thought to be independent of the individual.

Pragmatism

According to pragmatism, ideas are only important when they facilitate action (Kelemen & Rumens 2008). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the USA are when pragmatism first appeared in the writings of the philosophers Charles Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. It tries to bring facts and values, objectivism and subjectivism, accurate and rigorous information, and many contextualized experiences into harmony. It accomplishes this by taking into account theories, concepts, ideas, hypotheses, and research findings in terms of their functions as tools for thought and action as well as the practical ramifications they have in particular situations, rather than just abstractly. He believed that pragmatism was fundamentally a philosophy of meaning, and that each notion with real-world applications has a meaning that can be found in the relationships that connect its experienced conditions with its observable effects. An ideology or thesis is true if it functions satisfactorily, the meaning of a concept can be discovered in the practical implications of accepting it, and unpractical ideas should be rejected, according to the philosophical school of thought known as pragmatism.

Empiricism

Empiricism is the belief that all knowledge comes from sense experience alone and that all theories and hypotheses should be put to the test through a process of observation and experience (Heywood, 2000). The empiricist approach to philosophical inquiry was progressively used by a number of notable philosophers at the dawn of the modern era. Empiricism became a solid and powerful philosophical system during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the writings of intellectuals like Locke, Berkley, and Hume (Ayer, 1964). According to the philosophical notion of empiricism, all of human knowledge comes from sensory experience. Empiricism is a school of epistemology that rejects the idea of intuitive conceptions and places its whole emphasis on sensory experience and evidence. A philosophical school known as empiricism holds that sensory experience is the single (or the primary) source of all knowledge. As a result, it disapproves of the use of a priori reasoning at all (or frequently) in knowledge acquisition and analysis. Empiricism thus begins to have a defining impact on what constitutes a prerequisite for assessing any social theory early in the twentieth century. Empiricism is no longer an independently established basis for evidence for belief, but rather a hypothesis of the type of evidence that scientists prefer (Ayer, 2007). Empiricism supports the idea that experience is the only source of knowledge or that information can only be acquired through the senses. Only one who believes that knowledge can only be acquired by the senses may challenge this type of empiricism. The majority of individuals hold to the common-sense belief that our senses do, in fact, provide us knowledge of some type. According to Hume (1966), there are no beliefs that may be deemed reasonable when it comes to unknowable facts. If necessity has a meaning, according to Hume, it must be apparent in connections. Hume's philosophy concludes with the tenet that neither knowledge nor sciences are conceivable (Hume, 1966). According to Ayer, one cannot be completely certain of what one knows. A limited concept of knowing necessity exists. The truth of what is known must be true, but it need not be true. According to Ayer, absolute necessity cannot be known, but scientific knowledge is unquestionably true. It is illogical to argue that having a basic understanding of science is a must (Ayer, 1964).

Alignment of Social Science Research with philosophical stance

The philosophical foundation of the research process affects why, what, and how to do social science research. When used, the scientific research philosophy is a technique that enables scientists to transform their theories into knowledge during study. Understanding research philosophy is crucial because it is only possible to understand social science research in a meaningful way when there is clarity regarding the decisions that were made that affect the study outcomes, some of which are founded on fundamental philosophical principles. In order to learn about reality and to design, conduct, analyze, and interpret research and its findings, philosophy offers general principles of theoretical reasoning, a technique of cognition, perspective, and self-awareness. Researcher confidence in the nature and presence of the items they study is increased thanks to ontology. Epistemology, on the other hand, is concerned with every aspect of the reliability, reach, and techniques of knowledge acquisition. It affects how researchers frame their studies in an effort to gain knowledge, making it pertinent to social science. Objectivist research is useful for establishing external validity and dependability (consistency of result achieved) (applicability of the results to other contexts). Philosophical perspectives are compatible with social scientific research because they make clear the presuppositions that researchers are relying on to guide decisions concerning the study's goals, methodology, design, and methodologies, as well as its data analysis and interpretation. In order to ensure that the results of research are correctly and meaningfully interpreted, it is essential to understand the philosophical foundations of science. The many disciplines have felt the need to assess the status of knowledge claims because they are nearly always couched in terms of some philosophical justificatory framework in social science (Reynolds, 1973). Exploring, characterizing, and interpreting social phenomena involving human behaviour is the focus of social research (Sufian, 1998). Social science philosophy cannot be used or rejected in that way by the discipline. Since the subject we research is not entirely empirical, philosophy plays a role in our education, who we are as people, and how we approach our work. The philosophy of science came into being as a result of modern science's success. The philosophy of science examines the practice of science and tries to determine

what distinguishes scientific explanations and theoretical frameworks from conjecture, speculation, and pseudoscience; what gives scientific predictions reason to be believed; and whether science reveals a secret about an unchanging reality. The philosophy of social science makes an effort to understand what social science is. A science philosophy that asserts to understand the nature of scientific practice implies that one "ought" to adhere to the ethical guidelines set forth in the philosophy in order to do science. Each approach, method, and tool used in the social research process should be self-validated, and the philosophical basis for each determines if they are efficient or effective. Every research tool or procedure is intrinsically bound up in commitments to a specific version of the world and ways of knowing that reality established by the researcher utilizing it, which makes the philosophical questions raised relevant (Hughes, 1987). Because they operate under a predetermined set of assumptions about the nature of society, the nature of human behaviour, and the interactions between these two, research methods and concepts cannot be separated from theory or research tools, whereas philosophy merely aims to clarify the barriers to knowledge as true and logical. Being a positivist, or more precisely, a logical positivist, implies that the researcher is working with an observable social reality and that the research's conclusion may result in the derivation of laws or laws-like generalizations that are comparable to those produced by physical and natural scientists. According to Saunders et al. (2008), a researcher should use a positivist strategy if the field of study has a wealth of literature. A pragmatist approaches research from the standpoint of a problem and seeks to provide useful solutions that influence current practice. When there is uncertainty and a sense that something is off or out of place, the reflexive process of inquiry is sparked, and it re-creates belief once the issue has been handled (Elkjaer & Simpson 2011). Pragmatists' research may vary greatly in terms of how 'objectivist' or 'subjectivist' it ends up being because they are more interested in concrete results than abstract distinctions.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing research philosophy is an essential part of the research process since it broadens researchers' perspectives, which can improve both their research abilities and their confidence in the methods they are applying. How to research inquiries are essential. what should be researched? Is the perspective of the researcher on "Why research"? The researcher's presumptions regarding the interconnected ideas of ontology, epistemology, and human nature serve as the foundation for this viewpoint. Researchers must also keep in mind that their choice of methodology may be significantly influenced by their "What to research?" question; as a result, their philosophical analysis also prompts thought on the research question. Researchers should take into account that certain philosophical stances might prevent them from looking into a certain study subject because the applicable methodology might not be acceptable for the issue at hand. In conclusion, it's critical to comprehend how research methodologies and philosophy interact. In order to make a more educated choice about the research design, it is very helpful to have an understanding of philosophical issues and research methodologies. Second, it can aid the researcher in determining which designs will succeed and, more importantly, which ones won't. Third, understanding various research traditions enables the researcher to modify study designs in accordance with various knowledge architectures' limitations.

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