


# Chapter 3


## The Qualitative Exploratory Study: A Necessary Prerequisite to the Quantitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

*It is no longer to be demonstrated that research in management sciences is characterized by a paradox linked to the various choices that the researcher is required to make. These choices are closely related to the type of research and how it is conducted, and is based on a well-defined epistemology and methodology. An elucidation of these epistemological and methodological assumptions proves to be a necessity to assist researchers in controlling the research process and defining the process of knowledge construction. This chapter examines the epistemological foundations of research, focusing on realistic paradigms and the theory of knowledge. It also explores various methodological approaches. The attention, in this chapter,*

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*is particularly focused on the mixed methodological approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Through understanding these epistemological and methodological aspects, the researcher is better prepared to make choices, and consequently, to contextualize the research and critically evaluate its implications.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Qualitative research findings have demonstrated in the last few decades that they are essential to the progress of research (Hunter, Mccallum, and Howes 2019; Rendle et al. 2019). Publication of qualitative reviews and guidelines by prestigious publications, such as Health Services Research, Medical Care Research and Review, and BMJ, is indicative of consistent interest (Rendle et al., 2019). One advantage of qualitative approaches is their diversity in epistemology and theory (Rendle et al., 2019). Furthermore, researchers can give such advancement via a variety of qualitative methodologies (Hunter et al., 2019). Finally, a researcher must explain their methodological choice by illustrating how it connects to the study's objectives and offers the best means of accomplishing those objectives.

Authors do not, however, strongly advise using this methodology alone. Therefore, it is highly advised to employ a mix of methodologies (Guest 2013; Guest & Fleming, 2015). It is strongly recommended, especially, in the hypothetico-deductive reasoning approach, to use a complementarity of methodological approaches. Thus, we should opt for an initial exploratory qualitative survey followed by a confirmatory quantitative survey (Benabdelhadi & Benbrahim 2021; Frichi et al., 2020). The literature has often dealt with qualitative exploratory research and quantitative investigation separately. Both are employed in cases when the concepts being studied are ambiguous (Lederman, 1993). Moreover, the combination of both methods is used either in the context of a rich exploratory sequential approach stemming from case studies using relatively small samples to generalize results, or within a qualitative approach limited to interviews to identify variables for empirical quantitative methods (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014).

Many research publications that were published and claimed to employ an “exploratory qualitative mixed to quantitative method” design were found during a later examination of the pertinent literature. Upon closer examination, it became clear that these studies lacked theoretical support. Consequently, the authors suggest a theoretical analysis that considers the key components of scientific research to justify the use of an exploratory qualitative method preceding a quantitative study. These choices are not generally neutral but are closely based on a well-defined epistemology and methodology. It seems up that clarifying these epistemological

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