

Interpretivism

Facilitation

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Philosophy of Social Science

Group 2

October 13, 2021



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History of interpretivism

- Key proponent for Interpretivism was German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) who aimed to construct a more analytically grounded and empirically plausible framework for the analysis of social change. Prior to Weber, in the 18th century, philosopher Giambattista Vico had opposed Descartes, arguing that there is a **distinction between the natural and social world** and more importantly, that social organisation and social experiences form **our perceptions of reality and truth**.
- For Weber, sociology was inherently historical as he claimed that understanding the present (and the direction in which social change is leading) requires a profound grasp of long-run processes of social change. This was classified as interpretative. (Verstehen)
- Weber focused on **how people create meaning**, and how their personal reasons, feelings and motivations can be used to understand them.
- He developed a **multicausal approach** to analysis and went against prevailing evolutionary approaches and attempts to produce a general philosophy or theory of history. Instead, he wanted to provide a more open-ended comparative account of social organization and social change.
- Principal influences on Weber's world-view came from Kant, Rickert and Nietzsche

Elements of interpretivism

- Interpretivism claims that a study of human society must go beyond empirical and supposedly objective evidence to include **subjective views, opinions, emotions, values**: the things that cannot be directly observed and counted. They are phenomena that require interpretation.
- Interpretivism offers an alternative conceptual framework that is less deductive and deterministic, and amenable to greater multidimensionality in substantive interpretations of social life. It could be seen as a kind of “corrective focus” to what was considered as “truth” in positivism.
- **Reality** is complex flux of events and processes which can never be reproduced in knowledge. There is no aim at absolute or exhaustive knowledge but instead to make suggestions and promises of an approximation to reality within certain limits.

The fundamental nature of social reality

- Social reality is largely what people perceive it to be – it is **socially constructed**; social life is an accomplishment, intentionally created out of purposeful actions of interacting social beings

The basic nature of human beings

- People can have different values, motives, experiences etc. that are crucial for understanding people’s actions. People are **qualitatively different** from the objects of natural science (chemicals, plants, rocks)

7 Principles of Interpretivism

Klien and Myers (1999)

Hermeneutic Circle:

Understanding requires iterating between considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the whole that they form.

Contextualization:

Reflection of the social and historical background of the research setting

Interaction between the Researchers and the Subjects:

Reflection on how the research was socially constructed through the interaction between the researchers and participants

7 Principles of Interpretivism

Klien and Myers (1999)

Abstraction and Generalization:

Relating the details revealed by the data interpretation to theoretical, general concepts that describe the nature of human understanding and social action.

Dialogical Reasoning:

Requires sensitivity to possible contradictions between the theoretical preconceptions guiding the research design and actual findings

Multiple Interpretations:

Requires sensitivity to possible differences in interpretations among the participants of the same sequence of events under study

Suspicion:

Requires sensitivity to possible “biases” and systematic “distortions” in the collected data

Miro activity

<https://bit.ly/miroactivity>

Variations: Phenomenology and hermeneutics

Phenomenology

Phenomenology "seeks to understand how humans experience, make sense of and create meaning out of their existence"

(Maruna and Butler, 2005 p.49)

Key concepts in phenomenology

To find out about informants':



life world (or Lebenswelt): Each individual's subjective construction and understanding of the world around them, a personal narrative created with the help of building blocks and methods offered to him by others.



intersubjectivity: Mutual understanding or the overlap of agreement between different individuals' subjective experiences.

Phenomenological researchers use:



bracketing (or Epoché): Setting aside one's prior conceptions and experiences regarding how the world operates in order to be as open and receptive as possible to others' view of the world.



emergent themes: Themes that arise out of the subjective accounts that bring to light certain concerns and motivations which may not be directly referred to by the person but which have an influence on the person.



understanding (or Verstehen): The grasping of the subjectively intended meanings and symbolizing activities of others through empathy and deep listening.

A few key contributors to phenomenology

- **Edmund Husserl (1859–1938)**: bracketing/epoché, empathy, intersubjectivity, lifeworld
- **Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)**: structures beneath the surface of experience, goal of interpretation
- **Alfred Schutz (1899–1959)**: “intersubjectivity”, shared, taken-for-granted understandings
- **Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)**: embodied experience

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is primarily concerned with understanding and interpreting the meaning of a text or text-analogue

"Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt , to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is **confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory - in one way or another & unclear**. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense"

(Taylor 1976, p. 153)



Hermeneutic concepts

- Historicity
- The hermeneutic circle
- Prejudice
- Autonomization
- Distanciation
- Appropriation
- Engagement
- Fusion of Horizons



Using hermeneutics in business and management

- In qualitative research studies, the “text” is what people say and do
- Interviews, documents and field notes which record the views of the actors and describe certain events
- This material needs to be ordered, explained and interpreted in order to “make sense” of the situation
- The ordering is done according to the researcher’s theoretical position and by comparing one text with another
- The researcher’s understanding of the whole has to be continually revised in view of the reinterpretation of the parts

Critique of hermeneutics

- **Advantages**

- it enables a much deeper understanding of people in business settings
- is well-grounded in philosophy and the social sciences more generally and hence relatively easy to justify

- **Disadvantages**

- it focuses the researcher almost entirely on text rather than lived experience
- can be difficult to know when to conclude a study: when does the interpretive process stop?

Criticism and external competition

Criticism

- **Leave out a gap in verifying validity and usefulness of research outcomes**

Interpretivists aim to gain the deeper understanding and knowledge of phenomena within its complexity of the context **rather than** generalize these results to other people and other contexts (Cohen, Manion & Marison, 2011)

- **The view tends to be subjective rather than objective**

The research outcomes of interpretivism are unquestionably affected by **the researcher's own interpretation**, own belief system, ways of thinking or cultural preference, which causes to **many biases** (Mack, 2010) .

- **Lack of impact on practice and social reality**

Interpretivism's paradigm targets to understanding of current phenomena **rather than** focusing the problems related to empowerment of individuals and societies. Mack (2010) refers that this theoretical perspective implicitly neglects the issues of power and agency, which are features of our society.

External competition

• Managerialism

- concentration of managers' interests on how organizations are managed;
- stress the role and accountability of individual managers (Lawler & Hearn, 1995).



• Interpretivism

- Fail to support managers in the achievement of **predetermined goals** and objectives (Uduma & Sylva 2015).
- Fail to provide managers with requisite information that will help the managers to **make predictions**
- Fail to **plan ahead** especially in the high volatile and competitive 21st century business environment.

Hence it has been argued that Interpretivism's findings are not useful (Grey, 2013)

External competition

- **Positivism**

- What is general, average and representative
- Produces strong prediction
- Use large sample of people
- Reality is objective

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- **Interpretivism**

- What is specific, unique, and deviant
- Don not care about prediction
- Use small samples/individuals
- Reality is socially constructed/subjective

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External competition

- **Critical theory**

- blames society
- seeks to change the society
- Use a realist ontology (there is such a thing as an external reality)

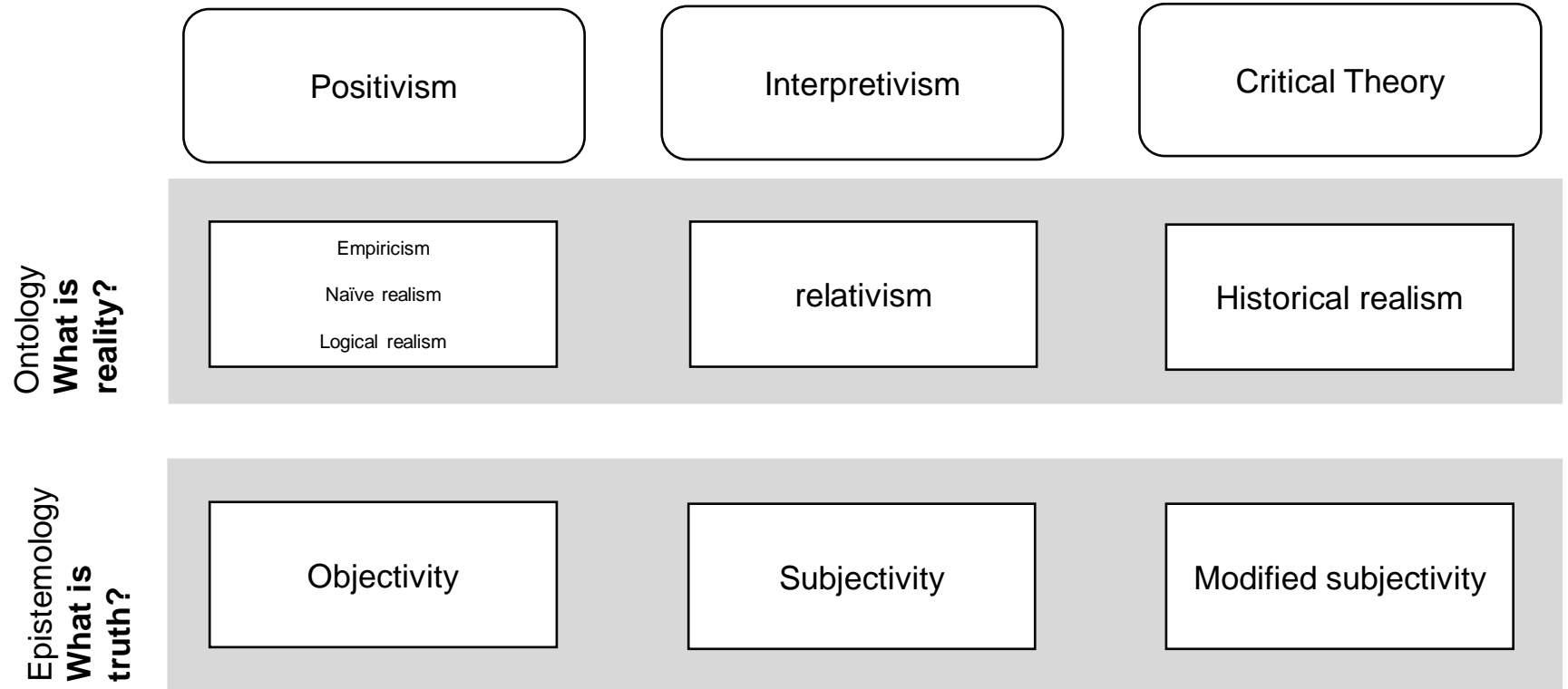
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- **Interpretivism**

- waits for a true critical explanation of society
- focused on the inside to understand of the why
- Supports the individual construction of social reality

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External competition



Bigger picture

Conclusion

The aim of interpretivism

“The goal of interpretivist research is to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour rather than to generalize and predict causes and effects”

Neuman, L. W. (2000)

Conclusion

The success of interpretivism

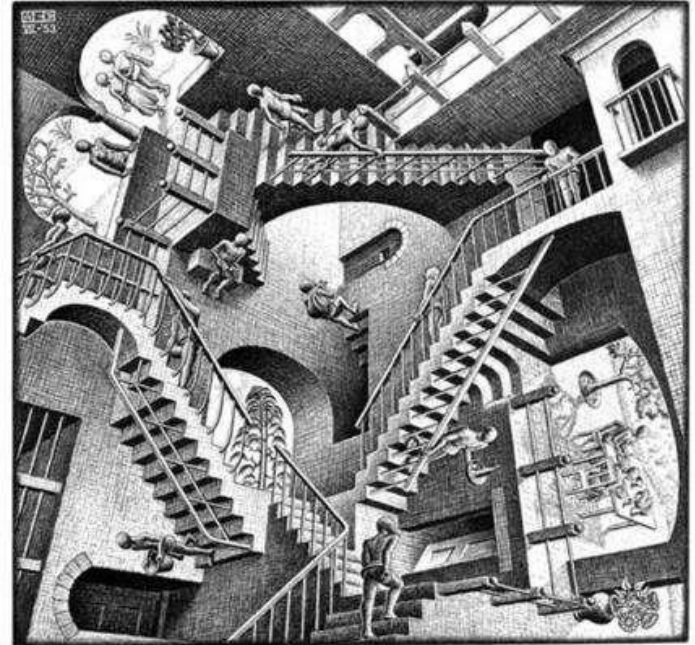
- Many positivist researchers view interpretive research as erroneous and biased, given the subjective nature of the qualitative data collection.
- However, many positivist techniques failed to generate interesting insights or new knowledge.
- That has resulted in a resurgence of interest in interpretive research since the 1970's, with exacting methods and stringent criteria to ensure the reliability and validity of interpretive inferences.

Conclusion

If the question is...

How to integrate human interest into a study and to employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue?

A: Interpretivism



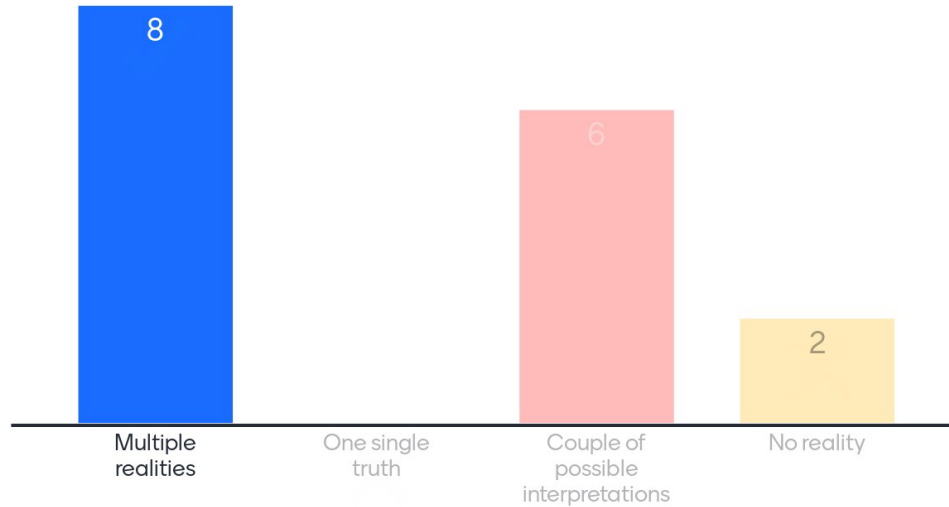
Menti questions

Please join <https://bit.ly/mentiquiz>

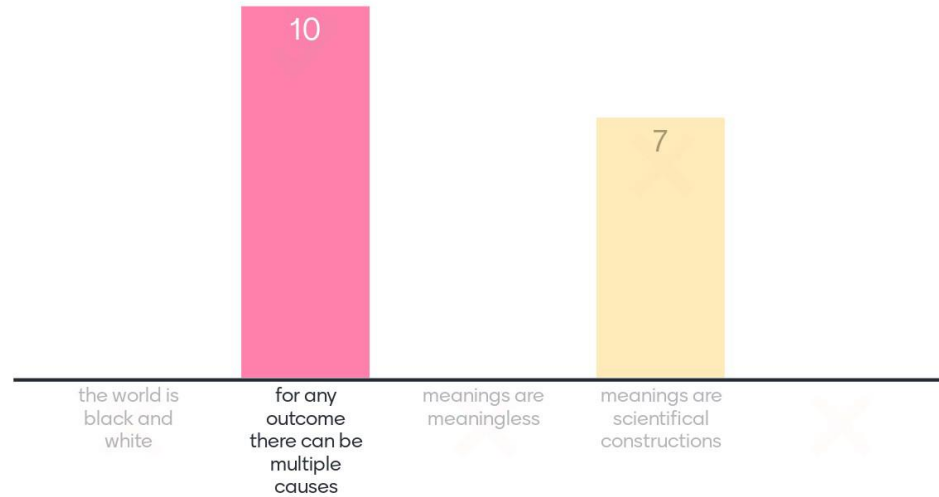
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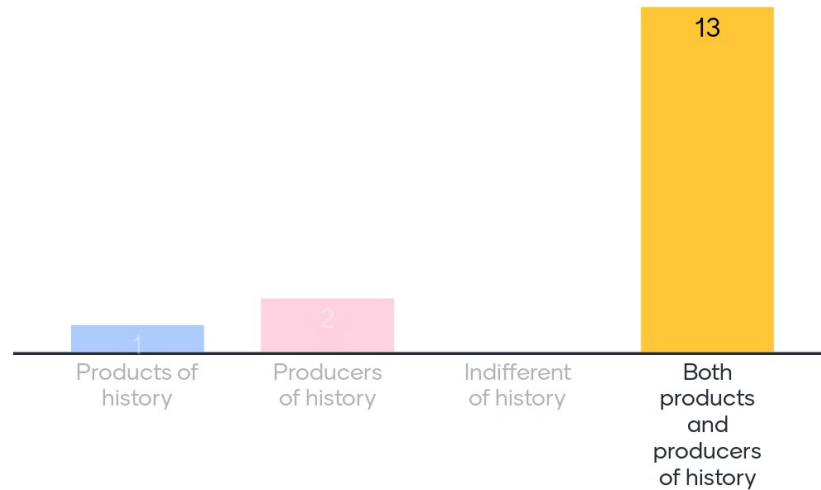
Interpretivism proposes that there is/are



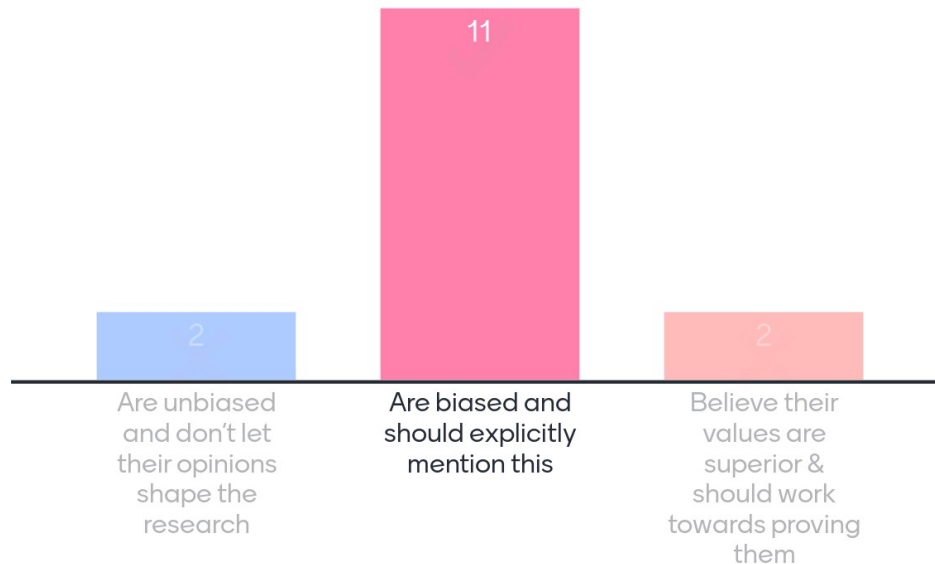
Weber suggested that



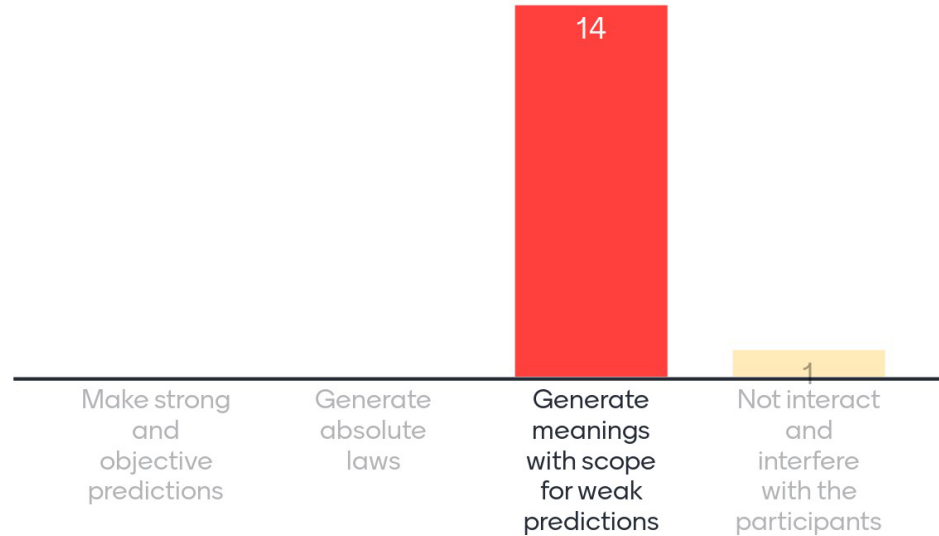
Interpretivists should believe participants are:



Interpretive researchers:



Interpretivists aim to:



Thank you



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