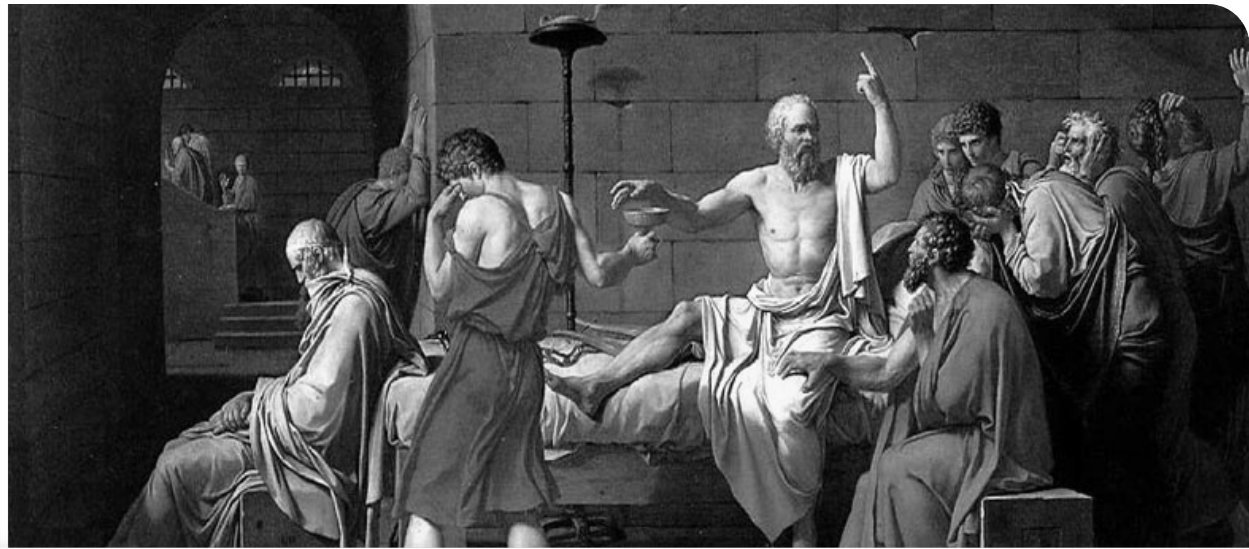


Unil

UNIL | Université de Lausanne



HEC | INFORGE | Reading Exam - 07.07.06

Studying Information Technology in Organizations: Research Approaches and Assumptions

| le savoir vivant |

Cedric.Gaspoz@unil.ch

Agenda

- A Dominant Perspective in IS Research
 - Evidence of a Dominant Perspective in IS Research
 - Beyond a Dominant Research Perspective in IS Research
- The Positivist Philosophy of IS Research
- The Interpretive Philosophy of IS Research
- The Critical Philosophy of IS Research
- Conclusions

A Dominant Perspective in IS Research

No theoretical or topical congruence among IS researchers (Culan 1987)

BUT

Consistent philosophical world view!

- Research design
 - Survey (49%), Laboratory experiment (27%), Case study (13%)
- Time frame of the study
 - Cross-Sectional: single snapshot (90%)
- Epistemology
 - Positivist (97%): descriptive (24%), theoretically grounded (73%)

Beyond a Dominant Research Perspective in IS Research

Beliefs about	Explanation
<i>Physical and Social Reality:</i>	
Ontology	Whether social and physical worlds are objective and exist independently of humans, or subjective and exist only through human action
Human Rationality	The intentionality ascribed to human action
Social Relations	Whether social relations are intrinsically stable and orderly, or essentially dynamic and conflictive
<i>Knowledge:</i>	
Epistemology	Criteria for constructing and evaluating knowledge
Methodology	Which research methods are appropriate for generating valid evidence
<i>The Relationship between Theory and Practice:</i>	The purpose of knowledge in practice

Positivist Philosophy of IS Research (I)

- Physical and Social Reality
 - "**discover**" the objective physical and social reality
 - researcher herself is seen to play a passive, neutral role
 - human action is intentional and rational
- Knowledge
 - search for universal laws or principles
 - methodology:
 - data collection: surveys and controlled experiments
 - data analysis: inferential statistics
- Relationship between Theory and Practice
 - relationship is primarily technical
 - researcher is value-neutral (impartial & detached)

Positivist Philosophy of IS Research (II)

- Assessment

- the quest for universal laws leads to a disregard for historical and contextual conditions as possible triggers of events or influences on human action
- the positivist aim to explain and predict external reality implies that people are not active makers of their physical and social reality
- "Research can only discover one-sided things if it insists on setting up one-sided relationships... You only get answers to those questions you are asking."

Interpretive Philosophy of IS Research (I)

- Physical and Social Reality
 - reality is a social product incapable of being understood independent of the social actors that construct and make sense of that reality
 - social world is produced and reinforced by humans through their action and interaction
- Knowledge
 - the language humans use to describe social practices constitutes those practices
 - methodology: field studies
- Relationship between Theory and Practice
 - researcher can never assume a value-neutral stance
 - researcher's assumptions and values are deeply embroiled in the phenomenon

Interpretive Philosophy of IS Research (II)

- Assessment
 - does not examine the conditions which give rise to certain meanings and experiences
 - omit to explain the unintended consequences of action
 - does not address structural conflicts within society and organizations, and ignores contradictions which may be endemic to social systems
 - neglects to explain historical change

Critical Philosophy of IS Research (I)

- Physical and Social Reality
 - social reality is historically constituted and people can act to change their material and social circumstances
 - idea of totality implies that things can never be treated as isolated elements
- Knowledge
 - knowledge is grounded in social and historical practices
 - interpretation of the social world is not enough
 - methodology: long-term historical & ethnographic studies
- Relationship between Theory and Practice
 - bring to consciousness the restrictive conditions of the status quo
 - act to transform the social reality where appropriate

Critical Philosophy of IS Research (II)

- Assessment

- alerts us to the reality of interdependence of parts with the whole
- status quo is one moment along an evolving dynamic of social reality
- critical researchers often are not critical enough of their own concepts and theoretical models
- the form of theory and knowledge in this tradition is uncertain

Conclusion

- All three of the research philosophies can offer an insightful perspective on the phenomena of interest in information systems research
- Researchers should understand and acknowledge the extent to which the perspective they adopt will focus their attention on some things and not others

"All social phenomena may have many potential ways of revealing themselves and the way they are realized in practice depends on the mode of engagement adopted by the researcher."

(Gödel 1962)