



JMTR’s Role in Business and Management Research

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Management thinking remains around human behaviour throughout the social progression. The purpose of this article is to review the scientific research in the discipline of business and management with a view to propose directions for the future research in business and management together with the role of JMTR in this context. The article is structured into three main areas; Scientific Research in Social Science; Evolution of Philosophical Foundation and Management Theories and Scientific Management Research in today and future.

Scientific Research in Social Science

Social science can be described as the study of society and social behaviour and includes many academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, geography economics and management. The debate regarding what constitutes in social science scientific research and the link between natural and human sciences has attracted considerable debate over a long period. For example, philosophers and great social theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, Karl Marx, and Max Weber have pondered this question (Rick & Peterson, 2017).

Yet, despite over two centuries of debate and discussion, questions remain around the validity of various research methods used in social science research. The on-going debate suggests the answers to this debate which are intricate in nature. Not surprisingly many scientific studies tell us that the practice and the meaning of social science are more complex than what many people perceive. Additionally, social science research is central to a “reality-based community” and it relies on people carefully studying experiences, events, and facts in social reality (Vogel, 2017). Interestingly, while social research helps us to answer questions about the social world it also raises new questions that may change the way we view the world.

Management, as a part of the social sciences family (Harlow, 1975), also relies on an understanding of other social science disciplines. The concepts and theories of ‘management’ that have developed were not a gift from God but have been evolving gradually over the centuries. For example, many years ago, the Egyptians built the Pyramids, the Chinese built The Great Wall, and the Mesopotamians irrigated their farmlands. In Sri Lanka, our own ancestors built massive irrigation engineering projects, Stupa and citadels such as Sigiriya. So, how did these early civilizations accomplish such impressive feats? Obviously, they had considerable coordination, organization, and human resource skills that enabled them to deliver expected outcomes effectively and efficiently (Patton, & Appelbaum, 2003).

technical and social tasks”. At its core, management can be viewed as a process of effectively utilizing an organization’s resources in order to efficiently achieve its desired outcomes. Management theories, like the social sciences in general, as discussed previously, have attracted considerable debate about being a ‘real’ science. Management research is concerned not only with “knowing what”, but also goes to the questions associated with “knowing how” (Tranfield and Starkey, 2002). Probably the most striking feature within the discipline is that management research operates on no single agreed ontological or epistemological paradigm and it is multi-disciplinary in nature. Further, Tranfield and Starkey (2002) indicated that it is a heterogeneous and fragmented field utilizing knowledge and research methods often drawn from associated disciplines in the social sciences.

Application of scientific method to the investigation of relationships among natural phenomenon or to solve a problem was gradually accumulated and management research evolved with more scientific evidence over the decades. Progressively, the mode of knowledge-production system expanded to trans-disciplinarily spheres in which “team working” rather than “heroic individual endeavour” established as a norm (Rick et al, 2017).

Evolution of Philosophical Foundation and Management Theories

A thorough understanding of evolution of the theory is important for contemporary managers (Davidson and Griffen, 2000) to work on evolving natural phenomena empirical applications are of paramount importance in business management perspective. A theory is a “conceptual framework for organizing knowledge and provides a blueprint for action” (Davidson and Griffen, 2000). A range of theories such as classical theory, neoclassical theory, and contemporary management theories have informed development of the management field. Successively, these theories have contributed to the evolution of contemporary management philosophies. Classical management theory that emerged in the early-1900s was the “first well-developed framework for management” (Davidson and Griffen, 2000). It consists of two distinct branches: scientific management and administrative management. Scientific management focused on improving the performance of individual workers as illustrated in the work of Taylor (Smith et al, 2012). Taylor developed a system where the most efficient way to do different jobs were identified, workers were scientifically selected and trained, supervisors ensured that workers performed their tasks as identified by management and workers were paid according to their performance (Davidson and Griffen, 2000). The administrative management theory,

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concentrated on the management of the total organization rather than the individual worker. Fayol, an important contributor to this theory, identified a range of specific “managerial functions of planning, leading, organizing and controlling” (Davidson and Griffin, 2000). Scientific research foundations in business research emerged during this period where the central focus was to build the knowledge to support the revolutionized industry expansion and social change.

Positivist social science, interpretive social science, and critical social science were three approaches that offered different ways to observe, measure, and understand social reality on which the management doctrines also relied on. Western European philosophers developed positivism, which emphasized discovering causal laws, careful empirical observations, and value-free research, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries which set the foundation for early management scholars Bodrozic and Adler (2018). It has been a dominant paradigm in the field of business and management research, especially as practiced in the United States since 1945 (Dawson, 2014). The paradigm accentuated precise quantitative data and often involved the use of experiments, surveys, and statistics in research. Researchers in many fields such as public health administration, criminal justice, market research, policy analysis, program evaluation relied on positivist social science.

A second approach, interpretive social science, originated in the nineteenth century and was significantly informed by Max Weber and German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey which have set new direction in the management research discourse. It is concerned with examining how people interact and with providing meaning for this interaction. In contrast to positivism, the interpretive approach acknowledges that subjective experiences, beliefs, and the behaviours of people can be as equally important as precise quantitative data which has become the core of human behaviour studies (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). The critical social science paradigm is based on, as the name suggests, a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves and others (Brigs, 2012). The critical social science paradigm was critical of some concepts of the both positivism and interpretivism.

In the 1980s, postmodernism and feminism arose from the critical social science paradigm and number of business and management researchers have worked in this perspective. Postmodernism, like the critical process, attempts to deconstruct the social world to gain an understanding of internal hidden structures. Postmodernists adopted a qualitative approach to exploring the social world and relations from which consumer behaviour studies, employee behaviours and satisfaction studies have got the basis during last few decades (Smith et al, 2012). On the contrary, the feminist approach used multiple research techniques to explore how existing social systems discriminated against women and other minorities. This approach attempted to give a voice to women and worked toward correcting a predominantly male-oriented perspective in the development of theory. Feminism presents the social world as an “interconnected web of human relations full of people linked to one another by feelings of trust and mutual obligation” (Gunter, 2000:8). These theoretical developments enriched management research field into the areas such as women rights, contributions, concerns and special considerations in various industry concern.

Hence, a distinctive characteristic of management research is that it engages with both the world of theory and the world of practice. Because, management researchers started arguments on increasing the efficiency of workers and organizations based on management practices, which were an outcome of careful observation. Based on that, the approaches such as classical approach mainly look for the universal principles of operation in the striving for economic efficiency. At the next generation, Neo Classical Theory occupied Human relations management and Behavioural science approaches were foundations for scientific research. Scholars such as Elton Mayo (Hawthorne studies) and Abraham Maslow (hierarchy of human needs) heightened management discourse through their findings. Their concepts have extensively been used in motivational theories in organizational and business management frameworks.

There are three key issues or debates at present in the context of business and management research and they are; the long-lasting tensions between qualitative and quantitative methodologies in conducting research; the second debate is that whether management research should lead to developments in academic theory or whether it should lead to solutions of practical problems. The former referred to as pure research conjures the image of white-coated scientist studying companies and their employees at a distance; the latter, known as applied research suggests researchers in grey suits or overall working with managers and employees to understand the strategies and practices. Third issue is that whether management research is driven by businesses or hegemony which is political oriented. This is because the research is taken place within the peripheries of formal organizations that have distinct boundaries which are controlled from within. Hence, access to companies depends on senior managers being convinced that the potential benefits will outweigh the costs. Consequently, researcher may have to confront the ethical issues and to navigate complex political relationships (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012).

This brings us back to the question of whose interests are served by business management research. Traditionally, the ultimate constituency for organizational research was managers. Scholars were encouraged to conduct research with “managerial relevance” or possibly “policy relevance.” Besides, business corporations kept growing bigger during the 1960s and 1970s, the need for managers to staff their internal hierarchies led to a massive expansion in management education. The demand for business and managerially relevant research was evident. Yet beginning in the 1980s, changes in the economy were reflected in the kinds of jobs taken by MBA students. Instead of seeking management jobs at MNCs or conglomerates, MBAs from elite schools went into [finance and consulting](#). Traditional corporations, particularly manufacturers, shrank or even disappeared through multiple rounds of outsourcing and downsizing, while the largest employers came to be in retail, where hierarchies within stores are relatively short. Meanwhile, information technologies increasingly turn the tasks of management (measuring and rewarding performance, scheduling) over to algorithms.

Contemporary management theories are concerned with problem solving and they use scientific approaches, mathematical tools and techniques. The different factors involved in management can be quantified in research and findings and expressed in the form of equations in this approach. Descriptive, correlations and OLS regression were extensively used in the previous decades and Structural Equation Modelling has almost saturated in terms of number of scientific publications in reputed journals (Rex et al, 2005). Management research also focuses on identifying the important variables in situations. Hence, Management researchers forces to identify the interrelationship and find solution to specific situations (Smith et al, 2012). Moreover, the modern scientific management researches force to apply the managerial knowledge in recognized actual problems and the variation of the environment in which they operate between different enterprises and levels.

Over the decades, management researches have been shifted from trans-disciplinary, to multi-disciplinary and today in to interdisciplinary researches in multifaceted subject areas. UN last year replaced MDGs with SDGs and the discourse of sustainability is at the core of industry and academia. Consequently, the management researchers are in a cross road in addressing this sustainability-bottom line orthodoxy (Rick et al, 2017). Therefore, SUSTAINABILITY will undoubtedly lead the management research agenda in next decade. And also, business and management research will engage in modes of research that are not only intellectually challenging but also how theoretical developments put into practice. Thus, the future research should focus both on theoretical developments while emphasizing the fact that these theoretical developments are essentially necessary to put into practice while focusing on quantitative, qualitative and mix methods. The enterprises, societies and technologies are progressed in a phase which is fare ahead the advancement of research approaches. The management research discipline is evolving into a more complex discourse and new paradigms such as mobilities have been introduced in sociological contexts (Hannam et al 2014).

In this backdrop, The JMTR is expected to play a catalyst role in disseminating knowledge within its scope and focuses the future directions in business and management research in the areas of entrepreneurship, business management,

human resource management, marketing management, tourism destination planning and management, tourism marketing, hospitality management, events management and so forth. Prominently, novel methodological approaches, unexplored areas and empirical issues addressing concurrent management issues are key focuses of JMTR. Equally, it is expected to be a platform for young researchers to contribute to the industry and academia through their research findings. This and future issues of JMTR will begin the project of opening up these new avenues of management research, facilitating the crossing of disciplinary boundaries, bringing new theoretical tools to bear on empirical problems, and enabling conversations between academics and policy arenas.

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