

Academic Research in Business Management: A Little Step Forward

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Abstract

The most prominent policy recommendations that emerges from the studies in the past is that policy makers are looking for ways to improve the contribution of universities to innovation based growth of business management theories, should take a enduring standpoint for developing theories, avoiding the temptation of quick "success stories". A particular hazardous policy practice is a target focusing only on the commercialization of university business theories through academic patenting and spin-offs, ignoring the broader contribution to economic development with other pathways, most notably the research based training and mobility of human capital from universities. Policy makers should be more "innovative" in their search for effective policy interventions, venturing beyond the old programs.

At the same time, they should be more serious about evaluating their new and existing theories. Business education in India is growing at a high speed. It may be the start of a glorious period for business schools and business education in India. In spite of this, for both business education and schools to thrive and to add to the effective management of Indian businesses, organizations and institutions, business education needs to be set up on a sound body of knowledge. Without genuine and experienced management theories that suit the Indian context, business education and schools in India will lose their meaning and validity. This is exactly the phase we are going through at present.

Introduction

Indian economy is worried about their future growth prospects in a rapidly changing world economy; their attention naturally turns to academic research as a priceless

advantage. Progressively more, governments are looking for a more direct and larger-scale involvement of academic research in information based development. To better understand how academic research can add to ground-breaking growth with particular reference to business management and to assess how India is and could be doing in this respect, we review the analysis and evidence of business management practices prevalent in India. Student and researchers' mobility from institution of higher education to industry is a vital instrument to transmit knowledge from the university to industry, particularly when the knowledge to be transferred is tough to codify and is personified in human capital. When looking for ways to improve the transfers from academics to industry innovations, most of the concentration in the academic literature and policy is on finding the critical success factors. One of the main factors being a sturdy cue of the substance of the universities' main mission as creators of primary interest. In general, the most prominent policy recommendations that emerges from the analysis is that policy makers looking for ways to improve the contribution of universities to innovation based growth of business management theories, should take an enduring standpoint for developing theories, avoiding the temptation of quick

“success stories”. A particular hazardous policy practice is a target focusing only on the commercialization of university business theories through academic patenting and spin-offs, ignoring the broader contribution to economic development with other pathways, most notably the research based training and mobility of human capital from universities. Policy makers should be more “innovative” in their search for effective policy interventions, venturing beyond the old programs. At the same time, they should be more serious about evaluating their new and existing theories. They also show that the responsiveness of multi factor productivity with respect to public sector research is higher when business R&D intensity in the economy is higher. This emphasizes the complementarity between public research and investment in the business sector. Without absorptive and innovative capacity in the business sector, the ability to capitalize on opportunities arising from public research will be limited. For cases of upgrading, bachelors and masters-level engineering graduates equipped with knowledge of the industry's practices and problems obtained from classes, practical theses, and internships are of greater

value than PhDs. Arrangements are more likely to center on long-term relationships between the university and established firms, rather than on spin-off formation. These findings cast further doubt on the utility of a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development that so many governments have been pursuing, with its focus on academic patenting, licensing, and startups. It calls for a broader view of the role of academic research.

Business education in India is growing at a high speed. It may be the start of a glorious period for business schools and business education in India. In spite of this, for both business education and schools to thrive and to add to the effective management of Indian businesses, organizations and institutions, business education needs to be set up on a sound body of knowledge. Without genuine and experienced management theories that suit the Indian context, business education and schools in India will lose their meaning and validity. This is exactly the phase we are going through at present.

Business schools and education institutions are at the intersection where they can prefer either to gain in the short-term by setting up a

store to hand out diplomas or to commend themselves with the lengthy period of providing business education ingrained in quality management research. It appears to be an fitting time to begin management education and institutions in India on a path that leads them to become one of the best in the world.

Although the debate raked up by Kumar's (2011) assertion that the state of Indian management research is depressing, coupled with the Union Environment Minister of India Jairam Ramesh's comment that IIT/IIM faculty is not world-class (NDTV, 2011) . There is growing disparity between Indian economic development and the current state of Indian management research. We need to increase radical knowledge, methods and valid domestic theories to serve the management students better, provide practitioners more effective solutions to the problems that they encounter, and support the quickly emerging community of management scholars in India. Unfortunately, in spite of big number of Indian scholars and Indian management institutions, of which some are old and deep-rooted, we have not seen painstaking and relevant research on Indian management. There is indeed

colossal opportunity to conduct research in the Indian context that can have a significant impact on practice.

It is a wake-up call for Indian management institutions to boost their scholarships. If they do not pay take note of, the authenticity of Indian business education and schools will be at danger. As opposed to 'placement exchanges', IIMs and other leading management institutions have to become 'temples of learning' and knowledge creators (Professor M.J. Xavier, Director, IIM Ranchi quoted in online publication, *Business Economics*, 2012).

The main issues that reflected several of the concerns are :

- (i) Should scholars interested in India take US/Western theories as the basis and generalise them to India or should they develop new indigenous theories?
- (ii) Should Indian management research use the US/Western model in terms of journals, conferences, and measuring and rewarding research productivity?
- (iii) Would Indian management research be better served by emphasizing publications in the so-called top-tier journals

in the US/West or would it be better served by developing and improving management journals in India?

- (iv) How can a critical mass of management scholars and scholarship on India be created?

Several renowned persons have lamented the current state of research and knowledge creation in the area of management in India. They have called for increased attention to creating knowledge on management in India, rather than relying on knowledge generated in the developed world, particularly the US. The underlying assumption in such pleadings is that if only researchers in India could repeat the research practices that have already been conventional in the West, we would not only have better research but also higher rankings for our institutions. In short, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. All that we in India, who desire to contribute to research in and on India, need to do is follow the paths created by the business schools and scholars that are currently highly reputed in the West, primarily the US. Greater care is required in deciding the future of management research in India without necessarily imitating the 'best' practices from other contexts.

If required we should be ready to reinvent the wheel.

There are several motives for the current state of research on management in India. Till very recently, research in almost any field in India was not valued by any of the domestic stakeholders, including governments, students and managers. Hence, most faculty members or practitioners were happy to rely on research done elsewhere. The dominant philosophy of 'universal' knowledge, which is very appropriate for the natural sciences (Scriven, 1994), was applied to the social sciences and the relevance of research from the West to the Indian context was rarely questioned. As a result, very a small number of faculty members in management schools in India dedicated noteworthy vigor towards original research and were happy to make use of knowledge developed outside the Indian context. The partial research efforts that were conducted further hindered by poor training, lack of concern in conducting research (which was related to local research being not valued), and a lack of motivation in the Indian system to sustain and prize research. But most essential, was the need of confidence in the Indian researcher to stress his

stand if it did not conform to the conventional insight from the developed world. As highlighted, there is a dire need for research on India that is both meticulous and pertinent. This offers a vast prospect and range for the key stakeholders of management research in India like the academic institutes, government bodies, publication houses, businesses. Formerly, most of the management research on India has been published in international journals by scholars based outside India, who mainly adopt theories, frameworks, and models from developed countries, primarily from the US/UK and to some extent from Japan. Consequently, the inclination of the greater part of these researchers has been towards the global harmonisation of management research leading towards union with the North American research ideas. While these studies have found some bearing of such tools and concepts to the Indian background, both cross cultural management and institute-ional theorists have time and again emphasized the need to study the research phenomena within exact contexts and with the help of context applicable concepts and methodologies. Ignoring the research context can both be misleading and

disastrous (Schuler, Budhwar, & Florkowski, 2002). Additional research facts from a number of cross cultural management comparisons has continuously confirmed that the Indian management system does not clearly fit with any of the established regional clusters of countries and India emerges as a 'cultural island' (e.g., Sparrow & Budhwar, 1997). Moreover, the greater part of the top Indian management institutions, to a large extent and perhaps due to historical reasons, use similar textbooks to the ones used in North American and British business schools to educate and develop their management graduates. The serious issue of importance of such research and teaching, particularly, in the present energetic Indian business context, which demands the design of pluralistic and original management scholarship in order to both perk up and link the relationship between theory and practice by conducting context relevant research. This means charting novel and pertinent areas and moving out of our existing comfort zone to conduct more perspective exact research with situation related constructs and frameworks. Without a doubt, this may be both a dangerous and a time

consuming proposal, but one merit pursuing in order to make a bona fide impact and to establish concrete fundamentals for management research that is significant to the Indian context.

Consequently, the crucial point of the research and the appropriateness of the methods of enquiry are agreed upon by a society of scholars who are pursuing research related to a family of challenges. For this reason, it is quite ordinary for the 'gatekeepers' of knowledge in the West to decline research that does not obey the rules to certain established norms and does not make sense to them. It is fateful that the so-called 'gatekeepers' of information in India, largely skilled in apparent institutions of the West, also find it complicated to welcome homegrown knowledge conception since the issues of importance and the methods do not do the accepted thing to the norms up to standard in the West. As luck would have it, many of the 'gate-keepers' of management journals are committed to accepted wisdom of 'worldwide' information and are not even conscious of the truth-seeking flaw in their assumptions as functional. As a result of this, there is a lack of publishing outlets, whether in India

or outside, for non-conforming research which makes matters only worse for those who dare to challenge the establishment and do something original. Since the eighties a number of industrialized countries have implemented or considered policies to strengthen “linkages” between universities and public research organizations and industry, in order to enhance the contributions of academic research to innovation and economic performance (Cohen and Noll, 1994).

Three Streams of Research on Management in India

The viewpoint of social sciences suggests many criteria that may be used to distinguish a theory or research stream as noteworthy. It will focus on three types of criteria

- (i) Correspondence,
- (ii) Consistency, and
- (iii) Practicality or Relevance.

Correspondence criteria inspect the degree to which a theory relies on observations from the phenomenon of interest for its truth value. When applied in a strict sense, a theory built on variables or concepts not readily observable is to be rejected. Most management theories do not pass this test, but the community of scholars normally agrees to accept a certain level of deviation if the theory has other strengths.

Consistency criteria review the scale to which a new theory or finding is consistent with existing knowledge in the field. Under the assumption that during the period referred to as 'normal science' (Kuhn, 1970) there is a need to build cumulative knowledge; new research needs to be consistent with the dominant paradigm else it is more likely to be rejected.

Finally, practicality or relevance criteria examine the extent to which the knowledge informs practice in a positive manner. Much of social science is motivated by the need to improve the context of their research, whether in the short or long run, in order to justify to them and to the larger society that pursuing that kind of research is worthwhile (Taylor, 1994, 1998).

Most researchers on management would want their research to meet the requirements on all three types of criteria, but most research streams favor one of them while trying to meet at least the base minimum on the other two criteria. Based on the emphasis placed on these three criteria, the research on management in India can be categorized into three streams.

Practice Oriented Research

The oldest stream of research on management in India is practice

oriented. This stream is closely associated with IIM Ahmadabad. It emphasizes practicality and relevance criteria over the other two types of criteria. If one focuses on the establishment of the IITs and IIMs in the years after independence, the focus of the institutions was very much towards contributing to the practice of engineering (and a few disciplines in the sciences) and management in India. These institutions had support from institutions in the West in terms of faculty, research infrastructure, and training for local faculty members. Thus, these institutions adopted the paradigms of the West. In the field of management, there was an emphasis on exploitation of 'imported' management concepts only modestly adapted to be applied to local conditions with the purpose of informing management education and practitioners. The purpose was developing good managers to contribute to the building of a strong national industry base.

Faculty members recruited from foreign universities and also locally trained faculty members who were hired later also adopted the same thinking. This paradigm gradually percolated to other management schools. Further, in these institutions, excellent teaching provided recognition, rather than excellent research.

Positivist Research

The second research stream in India may be labelled as the positivist stream. Of the older IIMs, this stream may be more closely associated with IIM Calcutta. It relies extensively on adopting Western concepts and theoretical frameworks, whether left oriented or capital oriented, and application of positivist methodologies, largely statistical, to contribute to research. This stream emphasized consistency with the dominant paradigms (in the West) and under emphasized both correspondence and practical/relevance criteria. While those who contributed to this stream of research developed a reputation among global scholars, lack of correspondence with the Indian context and neglect of practical criteria did not create similar resonance for them in India. Today, the calls for more emphasis on research to meet 'global' standards are forcing management scholars to adopt this stream. Visiting scholars from the West, particularly those of Indian origin seem to believe that positivistic research is the path for Indian scholars to follow. Many institutions in India are establishing incentive mechanisms to encourage scholars to pursue such research. Most researchers in India, particularly those not trained in the West, may not quite be equipped to conduct such research. Further, many who are equipped may be

unable to convince themselves to adopt such research practices because of their preference for correspondence and practical criteria.

Nostalgic Research

The third stream is nostalgic research. Such research is excessively focused on the past and also believes in a glorious past. The professed purpose of this stream is to develop management theories that have greater correspondence with the social realities in India. In practice, this stream draws on traditional Indian philosophy and takes an 'otherworldly' perspective on management which is extremely important in today's stressful management context. While its emphasis on management of the self is a significant contribution, it leaves unexamined large areas of human, organisational and social behaviour that are very relevant for management today. Further, this stream has not tried to respond to the 'scientific' critiques from the 'mainstream' researchers.

Conclusion: Integration of Three Perspectives

The research in and on India can profit if there is an attempt to generate a stage for management information that integrates knowledge from all three streams described above. Each of them has

'baggage' that needs to be cleaned before appliance to the present-day context in India. Nevertheless, each of them also has a central part that is completely indispensable for the same background. Therefore, there is a need to promote a research environment in India that creates synergies among the three streams to build a uniquely Indian paradigm. Further, there is a need to bring the focus of research back to generate and sustain valid and relevant knowledge, whether it is abstract, empirical or practical, rather than to submit to the rat race of 'publish or perish' and the clamor for rankings of business schools. Finally, there is a need to build confidence in the Indian scholar to think 'original' rather than follow the dominant global paradigms whether they are relevant to our context or not. The Indian Academy of Management is most suited to provide the platform that will rejuvenate research and knowledge on management in and on India.

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