

Introduction: Themes in Present-day Management Studies in South Africa

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Abstract

This 'Introduction' overviews thirteen contributions to present-day research in Management Studies (MS). The first eight articles deal with particular aspects of MS, such as entrepreneurial network analysis, research in customer relations management, establishing when small or medium enterprises are ready to utilise e-Business resources to leverage a competitive advantage over their competitors, the importance of managing organisations to function as learning organisations, issues in advertising and the impact of work equity on work satisfaction. The last five articles deal with different aspects of research in the field of Management Studies, such as action research, the applicability of survey research in Finance, the use of a Concept Matrix to ensure theme-based literature reviews, teaching and professional practice.

Apart from the significance of the rise of Management Studies as discipline over the last thirty years in South Africa, Management Studies has steadily become increasingly important for the Arts and Humanities. The main reason for this phenomenon is the increase in value that management knowledge and skills add to qualifications. For this reason, *Alternation* publishes this issue, and is also planning an additional issue in 2009. On the one hand, the necessary management knowledge and skills are needed in the business and management of the Arts and Humanities

disciplines themselves. This is especially needed in the context of institutional mergers and various forms of institutional transformation challenges that institutions of Higher Learning currently experience. In addition, the area of Postgraduate Research Management has emerged as an important field of management development.

On the other hand, our disciplines have to importantly provide students with access to relevant management knowledge and skills. For this reason, careful planning should accompany coherent and integrated modules that add to the value of especially interdisciplinary qualifications. We hope that the upcoming issue will address this and related topics.

According to O'Neill and fellow researchers entrepreneurial networking has been a relatively under-researched area in the field of entrepreneurship. They state that it is unclear why research on this topic has been avoided to date, but speculate that the multi-disciplinary nature of the topic could be a factor. The authors then set out to establish criteria towards the development of a testable model of specific entrepreneurial networks on the success of businesses and to develop a testable model to determine the impact of specific networks on the success of businesses. They begin with a literature review of entrepreneurial networking and critical success factors of businesses in order to establish a conceptual base for the exploratory research that they subsequently present. The exploratory empirical study uses a non-probability sample of small businesses in the Pietermaritzburg region, and discusses the issues, challenges, and limitations of this approach. It also provides suggestions for further research.

In 'Towards Effective Service Delivery ...' the authors argue that the transformation of the Public Service can be furthered by the principles of Batho Pele while at the same time enhancing the agenda for improved service delivery. They argue that the business requirement of customer focus benefits from the principle of Batho Pele because it is premised on a value and relationship management perspective. Their contribution then examines the notion of customer relationship management and its role in service delivery, focusing on a few trends and a model, thus creating an enabling environment for effective and efficient service delivery.

Husselman and her fellow researchers set out to determine whether forms of electronic communication, configured to deliver e-Business could offer solutions to challenges faced by chemical distributors in South Africa. They base their conclusions on an empirical survey that was conducted in 2006 among chemical companies in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) on the eastern seaboard of South Africa. The authors conclude that chemical companies would be more likely to support e-Business initiatives if the information that these distributors offer is convenient, reliable and dependable. They recommend informing prospective business (referred to as customers later in the paper) in the chemical distribution sector about the benefits of e-Business service, offering order to the levels of e-Readiness of client companies because their levels of e-Readiness were found to impact on the perceived benefits of an online service offering.

Poovalingam and Veerasamy examine how communication is currently being employed in the cellular industry to improve service to customers in an attempt to establish a long-term relationship with them. They do so by analyzing the communication process and the communication mix that cellular service providers utilize to engage with their customers. They present the results of a quantitative cross sectional study where the survey method was employed using a simple random sample. The target population consisted of existing cellular phone users, both contract and prepaid. Structured Interviews were used to assist the researcher in obtaining information from an intended sample of 300 cellular phone users. At the end of six weeks, 251 responses were received reflecting an overall response rate of 83.7%.

Their findings indicate that the majority of cellular phone users were satisfied with the communication efforts of their service provider and that the communication tools used by the service providers were

effective in promoting relationship marketing. Moreover, existing customers indicated that they would become advocates of their service provider, as they did not regret their choice of service provider particularly because service providers tailor make packages for their customers.

Coldwell and his fellow researchers explore the comparative importance of learning organisation disciplines in generating effective work outcomes in HR employees in two different national cultural contexts. They observe that how important the learning disciplines are considered to be in different countries may be influenced by prevailing cultural differences and prevailing organisational change situations. They report the results of a survey of human resource practitioners' perceptions of the importance of the five disciplines in generating effective work outcomes in a single UK and South African tertiary educational institution undergoing differential types of change. Research was conducted to explore these aspects empirically. A specific measuring instrument was devised to operationalise the five-discipline model adapted from Senge's (1990) seminal work.

Their results reveal that although the ranking of the five disciplines is cross nationally similar, the influence of national culture appears to affect the emphasis put on specific aspects. Also, the generally higher scores obtained by the South African sample on the discipline dimensions suggests that the specific change circumstances faced by the two institutions may have a bearing on the perceived importance of adopting core aspects of a learning organisation in achieving effective work outcomes. Implications of these findings are discussed in context of Hofstede's (1980) model and Senge's observations with regard to organisational change (Webber, 1999).

Cassim and Bexiga state that as the volume of advertising grows so does concern about its acceptability. These concerns are raised more particularly for advertising aimed at children. They note that statutory regulation combined with industry-led self-regulation does exist across the globe to ensure acceptability of advertising. In so far as children are concerned countries vary somewhat in the approaches they adopt for the regulation of advertising to this group.

The paper develops a framework of acceptable advertising to children and compares developing and developed countries on dimensions of the framework that ensures acceptability of advertising to this special consumer group. It is concluded that the framework for acceptable

advertising is present in developing countries. This assures the basis for acceptable advertising in developing countries.

Pramlal and Brijball begin by observing that teams play an integral role in organisational growth and its use has expanded dramatically to meet competitive challenges. However, teams need to be cohesive in order to be successful. Their contribution assesses team cohesiveness, based on seven dimensions, in a team-based police service department. A simple random sample of 61 members from different teams was drawn from a District Police Station, which is dependent on highly cohesive teamwork. Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire, which was statistically assessed, and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results reflect team members' perceptions of their team's cohesiveness and recommendations are made to enhance these dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness.

Coldwell and Perumal set out by referring to Adams' Equity theory (Adams, 1965), which suggests that employees' perceptions of equity or inequity stem from individual comparisons with salient referents of individual personal-referent perceptions of work inputs to outcomes ratios. They state that although the theory has proven to be generally correct in showing that employee motivation is affected by the perceived ratio of work inputs to outcomes, there are several aspects that have not been sufficiently articulated (Cosier and Dalton, 1983; Robbins, 1994:457).

Using a cross-sectional correlation research design consisting of a sample of academics specifically aimed at exploring input equity perceptions and effects, the authors report preliminary findings on the perceived influence of work equity on job satisfaction and work motivation.

Focusing on 'Action Research', De Villiers, Lubbe and Kloppe, observe that there is an increasing interest in action research in business and management studies due to a number of factors - an important one being that increasing numbers of degree candidates find it very convenient and advantageous to conduct their research in their experiential employer's organisation. This provides relative ease of access to interesting situations from which business and management lessons may be learned by conducting action research. In these circumstances, the action researcher is actually playing the role of a consultant to his/her experiential organisation. The authors state that there are a variety of different approaches to experiential training and it

is important for the action researcher to understand which of these are appropriate to the particular action research undertaken. After closely examining the stages and components of action research, this paper focuses on some of the details of how the actual research work or experiential training could be performed by considering the methods outlined in a work entitled *21st Century Process* (2001), Adams and McNicholas (2007), Van Aken (2004) and Baskerville and Pries-Heje (1999). The paper suggests how such research can be pursued in a rigorous manner and how the researcher can ensure that s/he realises the learning experience and thus the objectives of the research.

Frank begins by noting that survey-based research is in wide use, and that its development and application influence the social sciences profoundly. Still the acceptance of the method is far less in Finance than other business disciplines. Many do not consider the technique equal to other types of original research and circumscribe a complimentary, if any, role to it.

Frank notes that this disjunction between how survey research is viewed in social science research and finance research arises due to differences between academic approaches to finance from that of practitioners. Editors screen survey papers more rigorously as they report that poor execution or analysis of results often affect the quality of such papers. This paper offers three principles for increasing its reliability: survey narrowly defined constructs formed outside of or existing prior to theory; only describe a hypothesized variable as driving a result where sound prior theoretical arguments for that relation exist; limit the unit of analysis to the sample frame.

Kloppe and his fellow researchers document the concept matrix method of literature review that could be used as conceptual scaffolding at the beginning of a problem-based research project when the researcher's knowledge about the subject is finite and her/ his ignorance about it is more or less infinite. The concept matrix provides a means to systematise the process of literature review, thereby ensuring that a literature review does not become a subjective process stitching together a patchwork quilt of references, or the unilateral cherry picking of references that supports one's point of view, while ignoring references that present contrary points of view.

Van Loggerenberg explores the relationship between universities and industry and the opportunities available to academics doing research in Information Systems (IS) field. The author observes that in order for

such a relationship to stand any chance of success, both parties have to benefit explicitly or the relationship will not be sustainable. He explores the driving forces, focus areas, management styles, metrics, rewards and penalties of universities and industry for similarities and differences. The analysis of a typical day in the life of the IS academic and a day in the life of a Chief Information Officer (CIO), is used to highlight the differences between a typical IS academic (representing university IS teaching and research) and a typical IS practitioner (representing people practicing IS in industry). In order for research to be valuable to industry, research needs to be relevant not only in terms of time but also in terms of content and has to be written in a way which is accessible and understandable by the IS practitioner.

Worrall and his fellow researchers state that over the last decade, there has been much debate in academic research circles bemoaning the fact that management practitioners are not using the academic research being produced in universities. These debates have focused on the research rigour and relevance debate and on the need for new forms of social organisation for the production of management knowledge encapsulating concerns about the structure of business schools, the nature of management education and the conduct of research.

Yet, despite this debate and the clamour for increased relevance, the amount of funding that academics are attracting directly from business is continuing to decline. The authors state that the purpose of their contribution is to stimulate debate on these issues.

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