

Management Research

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Abstract

The book "Management Research" is a combined effort of Mark Easterby-Smith, Richard Thorpe, Paul R. Jackson & Andy Lowe. Authors have not only identified the importance of research in the field of management but also took practical steps to resolve issues arising due to the changes and advancement in the field of research. Philosophies and research methods were discussed and due importance was given to quantitative and qualitative techniques. Furthermore, they extended and updated the treatment of research philosophies, ethics, qualitative analysis, way of conducting literature review and approaches to writing up the results. Great importance was given to develop a sequence among the topics primarily, the content can be categorized in 06 broad areas i.e. Basic about management research, Philosophy of Management Research, Management Research Design, Creating and Making Sense of Quantitative & Qualitative Data and Writing and Disseminating Management Research. Apart from this discussion made on grounded theory was quite impressive. While explaining the concepts and implication of grounded theory, authors have not only discussed the historical and practical aspect but also share the difference of approach among the initiator of this concept (Glaser & Strauss). Another interesting point shared by the authors is related to sharing of methods by different end, like case method come from Positivist end, whereas it can designed in ways consistent with relativists and constructionist perspective.

Keywords: Research, Philosophy, Management, Quantitative & Qualitative Research, Research Methods, Creating Data.

Management Research – Book Review

Over the years there has been significant development in the field of marketing and management research. It has been observed that in comparison to previous years, more students have opted for higher education (M. Phil / PhD) degree. Due to the higher intake, field of research has faced new challenges. New concepts, ideas and methods have been introduced to figure out the hidden aspects. The book "Management Research" is a combined effort of Mark Easterby-Smith, Richard Thorpe, Paul R. Jackson & Andy Lowe.

Authors have not only identified the importance of research in the field of management but also took practical steps to resolve issues arising due to the changes and advancement in the field of research.

Their efforts were first materialized when 1st edition of this book was published in 1991; core concept of the book revolve around quantitative methods because they were in the ascendancy and tackle difficult issues associated with this method. After a decade, in 2002, 2nd edition was published; emphasizing on methodology of qualitative methods. Later in the 3rd edition another valuable contribution was made by emphasizing on philosophy, research methods and due importance was given to quantitative and qualitative techniques. Furthermore, they extended and updated the treatment of research philosophies, ethics, qualitative analysis, way of conducting literature review and approaches to writing up the results. They incorporate change in design / layout / color, used examples from their experiences and students participation to make content understandable. Glossary has been developed in a way that terms appearing first time are mentioned as bold text. In addition to this, authors have also use the web technology for further guidance by providing exercises and online test to develop higher level of understanding.

Identifying and suggesting solution related to the field of research was an uphill task. Diverse experience of the authors helped them to explore and address different issues faced not only by the academicians but also by the managers. Smith being the Professor of Management Learning at Lancaster University Management School holds his 1st degree in Engineering Science and PhD in Organizational Behavior. He has been an active researcher for over 30 years and published numerous academic papers and over ten books addressing various management aspects.

Being a Deputy Director at Leeds University Business School and a Professor of Management Development, Richard Thorpe, had early industrial experience helped him to identify the practical issues faced by the managers and suggests solution for these issues. Similarly, Paul R. Jackson, is a Professor of Corporate Communication and Head of the Division of Marketing International Business and Strategy at Manchester Business School. He published widely in various journals. Since 1975, he has been teaching research methods to undergraduate, master and doctoral students.

While critically analyzing the layout / content of the book, it shows that everything was well thought out. Great importance was given to develop a sequence among the topics primarily, the content is categorized in 06 broad areas i.e. Basic about management research, Philosophy of Management Research, Management Research Design, Creating and Making Sense of Quantitative & Qualitative Data and Writing and Disseminating Management Research. In this edition, notable contribution by the authors is to develop a link between philosophy and research methods. Philosophy provides the basic guidelines and laid foundation in the field of research. Making minor changes in the content make more effective for the readers to understand the basic concept. If philosophy section is discussed prior to the Literature review it will make the sequence of the content more understandable.

The book is appropriate for the audience who want to conduct research as a part of formal courses or as part of funded research project. Authors started the discussion and relate the present management concepts with historic contribution made by various philosophers. They also appreciated the Chinese philosopher for pointing out the advantages of division of labor. They also give credit to the USA for using the modern management terms. Different management perspective derived from 1910 to-date was discussed, debate among Classical to Learning perspective has been developed and criticism was shared as well.

After discussing management concepts, authors discuss management research and identify 04 distinctive features, i.e. management being eclectic, managers being powerful, educated and research lead directly to action. Furthermore, they identified 03 types of research (Applied, Action & Pure) and associate the same with Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Doctoral and Funded Projects for understanding of research and its implication in their respective areas.

While conducting research, one must realize that research work is quite demanding and need support and supervision of the experience supervisor can make remarkable difference to attain desired results. Authors have identified the key players of the research process (Researcher & Supervisor). They not only discussed the role and responsibilities of the researcher but also indentify the level of guidance the supervisor has to provide during each step of research process. Identifying the role and responsibilities reduces the ambiguity on the part of researcher and supervisor.

Starting point of any research process is “Literature Review”(Onwuegbuzie, Leech et al. 2012) that provides the extant literature of the field. Book not only describes the importance of the literature review but also mentioned how the literature should be critically evaluated for better understanding. Other than making critical review, authors have identified area that researchers (Students / Professionals) are not familiar related to the available sources through which literature can be searched. Authors have not only shared the available sources but also suggest the amount of time to be spent on each section should be allocated properly. Once the researchers have access to research publication might lead to ethical issues. Open access to such a high volume of research publication also leads to a plagiarism, hazards of which has been discussed from the ethical aspects and also categorize the concept (Plagiarism) so that researcher / students should avoid such act.

In previous publications, relationship between research and philosophy was ignored or its significance was not discussed in an appropriate manner. After realizing the importance, authors highlighted this matter in this edition. Discussion started by initiating a debate between Positivism and Social Constructionism. They discuss the concepts raised by different philosophers like Comte, Kuhn (Positivist) and Berger, Luckman, Watzlawick, Shotter (Social Constructionist), (Rosenberg and Cole 2008). Although the concepts have been discussed in great depth but the reader with little or no background of philosophy find difficult to understand these concepts. This problem would have addressed by explaining the concept with the help of example that develop higher level of understanding of the concept. Explaining the concept with example has been beautifully portrayed by Malcolm William & Tim May in their book “Introduction To The Philosophy of Social Research” and A.F. Chalmers by expressing the idea in his book “What is this thing called science?” develop better understanding for the reader (Malcom and Tim 1996).

In the next section, authors shifted from theoretical debate to the practical aspect of the research by linking the quantitative & qualitative design with Positivists, Relativist and Constructionist Research design. While discussing the Qualitative & Quantitative Research Design they identified that oversimplified definition (Qualitative: Collecting data that is mainly in the form of words. Quantitative: Data which is either in the form of, or can be expressed as numbers) lead to confusion. Issue has been addressed by using three basic epistemologies (Positivists, Relativist, and Constructionist) to develop a framework. Furthermore, they also identified different methodologies used in relation to different epistemologies. Authors have further discussed case studies and grounded theory as broad based method.

Another interesting point shared by the authors is related to sharing of methods by different end, like case method come from Positivist end, whereas it can designed in ways consistent with relativists and constructionist perspective. Similarly, grounded theory was designed by constructionist alternative to positive method, yet some respected version now contain positivists element. Such concepts can be well understood if researcher have strong grip over philosophy of research design (Rosenberg and Cole 2008).

Although authors have discussed different methodologies in qualitative research design but discussion made on grounded theory was quite impressive. While explaining the concepts and implication of grounded theory, authors have not only discussed the historical and practical aspect but also share the difference of approach among the initiator of this concept (Glaser & Strauss). Debate between the two (Saldana 2011) is based on a question that research should start with no presupposition and allow ideas to emerge from the data or otherwise. Authors have shared the opinion in favor and against this concept that makes the reader to better evaluate different views that develop higher level of understanding the concept.

After developing the philosophical foundations of the research, the authors move to the next stage of the research process, i.e. data creation. They highlighted this matter that basis of data creation should not be in isolation. It should be built on the philosophical foundations. They have discussed the qualitative and quantitative data creation separately and readers can differentiate the research domain on logical grounds.

Other than describing the methods for gathering qualitative data, authors also emphasizes on the skills and techniques required to attain this objective. For instance, while collecting natural language data, interview techniques are discussed and later they highlighted types of interviewing skills required for the researchers that can refers as a nice amalgamation of theory and practical aspect of the research.

Once the data has been collected by the researchers, it has to be interpreted and the researchers have to make sense out of it. Interpretation leads to various practical issues for which research has been conducted. They discuss different techniques for interpretation of collected data; content analysis is one of them. After describing the brief concepts about the content analysis, they further divide the process in seven stages, starting from familiarization to Re-evaluation. Each step has its own importance and has important impact on the research findings. Authors also shared the opinion of the predecessors (Glaser, Strauss, Corbin) who have expertise in this field (Charmaz 2006). Furthermore, they also discussed other research methods like discourse analysis, Conversation Analysis, Argument Analysis thus expanding the field and motivating researchers that they shouldn't stick to only one method.

Once data is collected, it needs to be interpreted to derive conclusion. Researchers can take help from computers and software to analyze and interpret data. Authors shared various available software; even they shared URL of those software providers. Although it was quite informative but it seems that they dive in a pool and find them swimming in an ocean. In order to explain how the software works? What are the inputs? And how results are generated, software companies develop manuals, whereas authors try to explain working of software in less than half a chapter. Overview of the software was sufficient and authors could have suggested any reference material or training manual for better understanding of the subject matter, instead of discussing the operational working of the software.

Once the authors completed the qualitative section they move to the quantitative section. First they describe how quantitative data can be created? Sampling design, sources of quantitative data and then measurement process were discussed. They highlighted the importance of sampling in the research process and also shed light that how wrong sampling can affect the accuracy of results. In order to overcome this issue, they identified two basic principal (Representativeness & Precision) during the sampling process. Furthermore, they also identified the relationship between the sample and population so that results should be more authentic and accurate so that researcher's efforts should be materialized. Sampling is primarily categorized in two main division i.e. Probability and Non-Probability sampling, sub divisions were discussed under these broad categories.

While explaining the sources of secondary data, the authors kept their audience in mind and share examples from international data base source. Sharing examples of NASDAQ, compu stat, data stream shows that authors are very much familiar with their target audience and were quite open in sharing those resources. Such examples helped to develop interest of readers who are familiar with the databases of other than author's home country. Although they have shared measurement scale for recording responses and also explain the phenomena with an exercise even though the content was quite less that restrict the learning curve of the reader while designing the measurement scale for recording purposes. Furthermore, in comparison to the discussion made by the authors in the section "Creating Quantitative Data" the content and topic were not discussed in great depth. Readers who are not familiar with the concept of creating quantitative data might not be able to fully understand. Similarly, slight discussion was made on the continuous scale by giving brief overview and alternatives available. Deep discussion would have added more value and better understanding of the concept (Miles, Huberman et al. 2014).

Once the researchers collect the quantitative data, same needs to be translated to make sense out of it. Importance of Frequency distribution and percentages are discussed and later emphasis was given on summarizing and describing the quantitative data. Furthermore, they didn't restrict their efforts on sampling or summarizing but move to one stage further by describing the rationale of hypothesis testing. Interesting part of the discussion is that they segregate the hypothesis testing as uni-variate cases (taking one dependent variable at a time) and multivariate cases (Where many variables are considered at once). They not only differentiate the concept but also discuss both cases separately for better understanding. Separate chapter has been dedicated to understand the concept of multivariate cases. Authors not only discuss the multivariate analysis of measurement models but thoroughly discuss the multivariate analysis of causal models.

While summarizing the two major sections i.e. generating and making sense of Quantitative & Qualitative Data, it seems that authors are more inclined towards the qualitative research paradigm. They give more space in their literature to qualitative research with respect to the methods and shared opinion of other researchers and develop useful debate, while making discussion on quantitative aspects; authors are somewhat silent.

Other than this, authors shared detail working of software while evaluating the qualitative research; on the other-hand software and their working are not discussed while commenting on quantitative research frame work. Although qualitative research field is new and need more emphasis and explanation but this cannot justify that new domain should be highlighted by undermining the existing field of research.

How well a researcher understand the philosophical domain and develop and strong design and interpret data by using all the available resources and get help from latest software, but if he fail to express his idea all his efforts will be wasted. After identifying this crucial area, authors not only focus on writing skills but also shared few techniques like early mind map for writing and shared template for writing reports. Furthermore, they also explained the difference between the report structure of quantitative and qualitative research so that researchers following any field should address areas which are relevant and important to their domain.

Furthermore, they also categorize the content on the basis of Private and Public outputs so that research should include the content that is relevant and meet the specific requirements of their audience. Authors are very much enthusiastic and willing to contribute for the development and understanding of the research field. Since 1991 they have not only shared their experiences through writings but also identified the needs of research domain and suggest valuable solutions by moving from quantitative to qualitative research design. They also emphasized that researchers should develop link between the philosophical dimensions with their research activity to produce solid, authentic and effective results.

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