Problems of organisational research

EVIDENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF ORGANISATIONAL RESEARCH.

Research is a process that people go through in order to find out answers to questions in a systematic way, which will then increase their knowledge (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005) in Saunders et al (2007).

The purpose of this review essay is to critically discuss evidence and the problem of organizational research, using four academic articles. This review will amongst other things, try to outline the debate on possible approaches to business research, look at the arguments for evidence based research and give an explanation of the problems identified with this approaches.

The first article under review is by M. Saunders, P. Lewis and E. Thornhill, (2007) titled ' The nature of business and management research, taken from their Research Methods for Business Students.

This article discusses the debates on the status of business and management research. One popular aspect of this debate is on the ' transdisciplinary' nature of management research. This is a situation whereby knowledge from different disciplines helps management research in no small measure to advance, which otherwise cannot be gotten from the disciplines separately.

Another debate arising from this article is ' that research should complete a virtuous circle of theory and practice' (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998) in Saunders et al (2007). This is whereby business and management research will have to apply both theory and practice to increase knowledge.

The third debate which this article discusses is how management research can meet the double hurdle of been rigorous both in theory and method while engaging the world of practice and relevance (Hodgkinson et al, 2001) in Saunders et al (2007). This debate arises mainly from Gibbons et al (1994) work on the production of knowledge and its concepts.

The implications of these debates are that business and management research will now have ' to address business issues and practical managerial problems in addition to advancing knowledge and understanding'. This however may turn out to be a problem because research that has no commercial value now might have value in the future (Huff and Huff, 2001) in Saunders et al (2007).

The second article, ' Evidence based management' by Pfeffer and Sutton(2006), discusses the issue that managers, very much like doctors, rely on outdated knowledge, traditional ways of doing things and their own methods and skills. As with medicine according to Pfeffer and Sutton (2006), managers should in addition to practice and experience, use best logic and evidence to achieve better results.

This is because, as opined by Pfeffer and Sutton (2006), even though research on medical practices abound, doctors do not use them. This is the case also with managers because as per their argument, ' managers are actually much more ignorant than doctors.... and they are less eager to find out'. Although Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) posit an evidence based movement among managers, they do not loose sight of the challenges which are that the evidence is weaker because everyone lays claim to been a management

expert and because of the dynamics from one company to another, that what works for one company may not work for another company.

Reasons why managers prefer to make decisions that are not based on new evidence without giving it a serious thought, according to Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) is that they rely heavily on past experience. Dogma and belief is another major driver of manager's decisions while ideology has its own fair share of the blame. Hype and marketing also plays a major role in the decisions taken by managers as much as imitation of another company's style; so does casual benchmarking though if well utilized can be cost effective but what works in one company may not work for another.

In spite of the factors militating against evidence based management, as posited by Pfeffer and Sutton (2006), ' organizations will perform better if leaders knew and applied the best evidence'. This boils down to the point of ' providing training, technologies and work practices so staff can take the critical results of the best studies to the bedside'. These managers can achieve through demanding evidence, adopting a neutral stance towards ideologies and theories, examining logic, treating the organization as an unfinished prototype, embracing the attitude of wisdom and cultivating the right balance of humility and decisiveness, Pfeffer and Sutton (2006).

The third article under review, ' The narrative of evidence based management: a polemic' by Morrell K, (2008) discusses that evidence based management is an offshoot of evidence based medicine which tries to apply ' the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions' (Sackett et al 1996) in Morrell(2008).

Based on the extensive research carried out in the field of evidence based management, agencies of government and policy makers have taken on board principles of evidence based management, even though there is still no consensus as to what really evidence is in management studies or on what will be used the determine the quality of evidence (Dopson, 2006) in Morrell (2008).

This article also points out the political and moral implications for management both as research and practice, arguing that ' current attempts to translate the principles of evidence based management have overlooked the role of ethics and judgments (Sackett et al, 1996) in Morrell (2008).

Morrell (2008) is of the opinion that not all those pushing for ' evidence based' approaches were in tune with each other as they used different variants to achieve their own purposes. However, they share the view about the relationship that management research has to management practice and the modes of research and forms of knowledge production that it promotes.

Morrell (2008) argues that ideology has a part to play in evidence based management and the strands which he identified which can be traced are pragmatism, progress, systematization, technique and accumulation. Based on these, there is a commitment to positivism which means that our knowledge of the social world increases through experiment and that there should be a more scientific approach to the research of the social. This, according to (Hammersly, 2001) in Morrell (2008), is explicit in the goal of building an evidence base or knowledge stock which will give evidence about the social world.

Consequent upon these, those who are in support of evidence based approaches state the intention of carrying out research to inform practice as according to (Young et al, 2002) in Morrell(2008), a common belief is that evidence is key to encouraging the adoption of practices by those who are entrusted with policy formulation or other players.

The third argument propounded here is the commitment to and development of a common language with the adoption and redefinition of key terms, ' through', ' objective', ' transparent', ' rigorous', ' systematic' and ' narrative'. Here, existing criticism has overlooked the lapses in evidence based literature, yet, making it too simple, restraint and regimentation will have both political and moral implications that can lead to liberty been curtailed, Morrell, (2008).

From the arguments, it is clear that evidence based approach offers a fresh scope to analysis using an esthetic that highlights the political and moral implications of the approach to management. As opined by (McLaughlin 2001) in Morrell (2008), researchers aspire to a way of evaluating the quality of proven evidence.

Morrell argues that the apparent lack of a common ground in management studies is a problem because consensus is needed if the study of management will grow. This is because even in medicine where there seems to be a certain level of agreement, ' the adoption of promising practices is not governed by the principles of evidence, robust scientific evidence is not, of itself, sufficient to ensure diffusion Morrell (2008).

The fourth and final article under review, ' Dynamic Capabilities and Knowledge Management: an Integrative Role for Learning?, Eaerby-Smith and Prieto (2008), discusses the dynamic capabilities approach of strategic management (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008) which sets out to show why some organizations succeed more than others in building competitive advantage within changing markets. Here, the management of knowledge has been put forward as a primary strategic initiative and the most important factor that will guarantee a sustained competitive edge for companies (Grant, 1996) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008). While the dynamic capabilities school emphasizes the renewal of resources by reconfiguring them into new capabilities and competencies as posited by (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008),

While the dynamic capabilities school emphasizes the renewal of resources by reconfiguring them into new capabilities and competencies as posited by (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008), according to (Cepeda and Vera, 2005) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008), knowledge management research often focuses on providing solutions to managers to create, retain transfer and use an enterprise's explicit and tacit knowledge.

This article under review relates to the debate in the sense it shares some views with the other authors. According to Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008), there are times when researchers, without been aware of it, use ideas and models drawn from other fields not knowing the discussions that have lead to the constructs coming to light, and this sometimes leads to a confusion of

concepts between the fields. Again, because researchers may not know the potential limitations in the other field, they may build their research on quick sand. Furthermore, without proper information of the other field, researchers may loss opportunities to better develop their own fields.

In relation to the other articles, the idea of knowledge management has become important due to the increased awareness of the importance of knowledge for a companies prosperity and survival, (Grant, 1996; Kogut and Zander, 1992) in Easterby-Smith and Prieto (2008). In this article, Lave and Wenger (1991), come up with the idea that knowledge is ' situated' in the practice of everyday work, while (Cook and Yanow, 1993; Nicolini and Meznar, 1995; Nicolini, Gherardi and Yanow, 2003) propound the idea that organizational knowledge is sustained through social processes within ' communities of practice'.

In the light of all that that has been reviewed, it can be deduced that even though the writers of these articles seek to find the right approach to solving the problems of organizational research, they go about it in different ways and have their own views. They however share similar ideas and even though there is no consensus.

REFERENCES:

Easterby-Smith, M., Prieto, I. M. (2008), Dynamic Capabilities and Knowledge Management: an Integrative Role for Learning? British Journal of Management, 19, pp235-249.

Morrell, K. (2008), " The Narrative of ' Evidence Based' Management: A polemic", Journal of Management Studies, vol. 45 no. 3, pp613-635.

Pfeffer, J and Sutton, R, (2006), ' Evidence based management', Harvard

Business Review, Jan, pp63-74.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, E. (2007), ' Research methods for

Business Students', London: Prentice Hall, pp4-9.