Poppers view on science applied to management theory report example

Business, Management

Abstract

Popper's View on Science Applied to Management Theory

Introduction

Popper's view on science disregards the induction, considering that theories must be submitted to experiments before considered scientific, otherwise things, if they cannot be experimented, theories are not scientific, but of other nature, such as metaphysical, and the philosopher aims to differentiate between the empirical science and the metaphysics (Corvi, 2005). This perception contributes to expanding human knowledge, because taking knowledge for granted determines scientific stagnation, while testing proven theories as falsifiable leads to further discovery and learning new theories, generating scientific advancement. Applied to management, Popper's view on science indicates that the management theories advanced by others should not be considered axioms, or apriori correct and efficient and applied over and over again, but they must rather be subjected to testing, verification or falsifiability, so that following the experiments new management theories to be discovered.

Paragraphs

The philosopher explains the problem of induction and of induction methods of study by stating that for any conclusion that scientists reached through inferring universal statements (hypothesis or theories) from singular ones (particular statements), they may always turn out to be false, exemplifying that " no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed,

this does not justify the conclusion that all swans are white" (Popper, 2002, p. 4). As Popper attempts to eliminate the inductive logic, by distinguishing between empirical science and metaphysics or other non – scientific knowledge, he states that there is no induction, as there is not possible to deduce the universal theories from particular statements (Corvi, 2005). Popper's theory also sustains that things in life, as well as theories, are exposed to a continuous repeatability, because the testing should go on and on so that scientists can permanently aim to verify if the theories are falsifiable, by testing their statements (Popper, 2002). In relation to repeatability, Nietzsche supports the theory of the circularity of life, following the same course over and over again throughout eternity (Copleston, 1994). Popper's view on science holds that in science, the laws of nature or other theories can be partly decided and never considered as definitely truth, but permanently tested and exposed to falsifiability, in order to identify unobservable data by conflicting with the data which the theory seeks to demonstrate or explain, which otherwise would have been considered as truth (Corvi, 2005).

For arguing Popper's idea that theories are to be submitted to permanent tests for discovering new knowledge (Popper, 2002), Nietzsche sustains that the world – process consists of successive combinations of centers of forces (which will be adapted to theories, for following the course of the discussion), which are determinate, finite, therefore, limited (Copleston, 1994).

The consequences of Popper's view on science as far as management theory is concerned indicate that management theories are redundant, as they apply over and over again in various cases, without being tested and

subjected to falsifiability for identifying new knowledge. Based on the philosopher's view regarding the inductive method, the general theories that have been settled in management act like universal knowledge in this domain, without considering the singular cases. Therefore, as the philosopher have stated that if in general the swans we see are white this does not mean that we have to generalize to considering that all swans are white, the management notions, concepts and theories are, in fact generalized and not exposed to continuous testing, applied to the new situations. As Moss (2003) observes, there are three problems with the management theories, according to Popper's view on science, out of which many of the current management theories suffer from at least one of them: over – reliance upon untestable ideas originating from psychological field; vague language, which brings the gloss over phenomena; over cautious predictions that become practically useless.

In other words, many of the currently employed management theories are based on a copy – paste technique, where the business man employ them without testing them, testing their statements, arguing and contrasting the elements of the theory, for challenging the theory with the purpose of finding new knowledge. As Remenyi (2000) indicates, Popper is contrasting the positivism in science and according to non – positivist research, the researcher should aim to go beyond the surface information, attempting to explore new answers, by asking " ' What', ' Why' and ' How'" (p. 96). The current management theories suffer of a handicap in the sense that they tend to protect the existent knowledge in the detriment of generating progress through contributing to making them flourish (Ghoshal, 2005),

which follows the model of Popper, regarding his view on science. Therefore, the philosopher prompts the necessity of experimenting for sustaining continuous learning and knowledge, as only experience can judge the truth held in a certain theory (Johnson & Duberley, 2000), because, in fact, the management theories applied in the nowadays business environment are likely to be false or not applicable to certain situations. Or, if elements of a theory of management were to be considered false and tested as such, the results of the experiments might turn other outcomes, which otherwise would have not been identified. Taking for granted concepts, notions or full theories of management is contrary to Popper's epistemology that encourages the new discoveries and supports the pioneers of new experiments. As Ghoshal (2005) puts it, management theories are " in the air" and managers, even those who did not attend a business school – are pursuing them, legitimizing their actions and their behaviors, determining their day – to day – decisions and shaping their intellectual order (p. 75).

Ghoshal (2005) also argues that management theories are currently overwhelmingly causal while Popper's theory about science states that the world of thought – process stands in causal relationships, implying that past actions influence the future through a causality relationship (Corvi, 2005). Concerned about the management theories as they are being applied in the educational field, Ghoshi (2005) considers the academicians responsible for too much freedom in making business studies a science, while ignoring the consequences that they have upon students and upon society as a whole, observing that teaching agenda should be customized on the various

faculties or departments' needs. However, this assertion does not argue Popper's view on science, but it rather sustains it, as Ghoshi (2005) continues his claim by stating that the management theories, which serve as dogmas in the nowadays business context should be challenged.

" When doesn't this work?" is a question that Christensen and Raynor recommends managers to ask themselves for establishing what management theories they should apply, searching beyond the theories set by the theoreticians in order to avoid applying theories that worked for other companies, generalizing that they might work in all cases (2003).

Powell (2001), on the other hand, noting that management is formed of research – based theories, considers that pragmatism is the viable epistemological justification, having as much justification as the " philosophical foundation for transferring knowledge to managers" (p. 885). Although the researcher suggests that the pragmatic perspective will lead to progress by engaging people in a " war of ideas", he also agrees with Popper's view on science by stating that by applying the pragmatic approach for developing knowledge, managers should not consider, in their vanity that they reached the truth/the reality (Powell, 2002, p. 886).

Therefore, the consequences of Popper's view on science applied to management theories suggest that they are absorbed and taken as dogmas by managers and the problem with this approach is that it hinders the further knowledge and development. In defense to this identified consequence, I consider that management theories do have a large area of applicability in the current business world and they help managers bring their businesses to a common denominator, being equipped with the

features required for competing in the 21st century global business environment. Moreover, management theories put managers on the same track, allowing them to make use of the same knowledge, sharing common language or concepts, which is highly required, just as a community requires the same language, values or principles for staying united. The fact that managers should be aware of the management theories is beneficial for their businesses, but it does not imply that they utilize them as dogmas, because knowing a theory does not automatically mean that one has to apply it as such. Managers nowadays do experiment and try various theories for finding the one(s) that best fit their organization and even adjust theories where needed. As such, Keitner (2009) observes that the management theories are adapted to local cultures and not imposed as they were elaborated in their original form, and this contributes to the development of knowledge. The adaptation of management theories also has an epistemological value, since the adaptation of the theories starts by assuming that the theory is false and it will not be applicable (truth) to all the organizations.

Conclusion

As a consequence of Popper's view on science, which states that scientific theories should be exposed to falsifiability, so that further knowledge to be permanently extracted from them, the management theories seem to drown in dogmatization, as they seem to be taken for granted and applied as such in every instance, contrary to Popper's observation that noted that the general does not always apply to specific. In defense for the dogmatization of management theory, this paper has found that knowing management

theories, only offers managers a common ground for further discussions and for eventual corrections or adaptations to the local, cultural or other specific differences, which contributes to the evolution of these theories, as the adaptation or corrections start from the premises that something might not be applicable in a specific situation, hence, that the theory is falsifiable. Therefore, management theories are subjected to progress and managers do apply the falsifiability, and with this they contribute to further developing the theory. However, the main threat is that, according to Popper's view on science, the managers might consider that their adaptations of the existent managerial theories to be truth and to not try to falsify them again and this would indeed, impede further development.

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