



ROUND TABLE

Management research in India: Current state and future directions

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Abstract Concerned over the lack of high quality, context specific management research in India, and the predilection of Indian researchers to follow Western models of research and publication blindly, the authors take stock of Indian management research in this round table discussion and debate some of the relevant issues. Urging Indian researchers to strive for the levels of rigour of the Western models, they make a case for confident indigenous scholarship to suit the development and educational requirements of the country, following context-relevant constructs and methodologies in research and developing curricula, materials and modes of dissemination independently. These ideas were also explored at the second Indian Academy of Management Conference held at IIM Bangalore in December 2011.

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Introduction

Business education in India is growing rapidly. It may very well be the beginning of a golden era for business schools and education in India. However, for both business education and schools to thrive and to contribute to the effective management of Indian businesses, organisations and institutions, business education needs to be founded on a sound body of knowledge. Without valid and tested management theories that fit the Indian context, business education and schools in India will lose their relevance and legitimacy. Many believe that this is exactly the phase they are going through at present, making their education and curricula

suspect (Report of the Working Group on Management Education, 2007).

Business schools and education are at the crossroads where they can choose either to gain in the short-term by setting up shop to hand out diplomas or to entrust themselves with the long haul of providing business education rooted in high quality management research. It appears to be an opportune time to launch 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 dismal, coupled with the Union Environment Minister of India Jairam Ramesh's comment that IIT/IIM faculty is not world-class (NDTV, 2011) initially sparked our interest in this issue, our chief concern is the lack of advancement in the Indian management scholarship. There is an increasing gap between Indian economic development and the current state of Indian management research. We need to develop cutting-edge knowledge, methods and valid indigenous theories to serve the management students better, provide practitioners more effective solutions to the problems that they encounter, and support the rapidly emerging community of management scholars in India. Unfortunately, despite the large number of Indian scholars and Indian management institutions, some of which are old and well-established, we have not seen rigorous and relevant research on Indian management. (Indian management researchers can learn from the Chinese management scholars who under the auspices of Asia Academy of Management have managed to bring together a critical mass of scholars working in East Asia, and founded journals like Asia Pacific Journal of Management and Management and Organization Review.) There is indeed immense opportunity to conduct research in the Indian context that can have a significant impact on practice. The quality of papers and presentations at the recently concluded Indian Academy of Management Conference at IIM Bangalore was encouraging and made us bullish on the future of management research on India.

While there was some negative reaction from IIT/IIM faculty, students and alumni to Union Minister Jairam Ramesh's remark (NDTV, 2011), there is an element of bitter truth in what he said. His comment should serve as a wake-up call for Indian management institutions to boost their scholarship. If they do not pay heed, such remarks from various individuals and institutions would become more commonplace and the legitimacy of Indian business education and schools will be at risk. 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).

While we do agree with Kumar (2011) broader conclusion that the state of Indian management research is not satisfactory, we are not sure if the methodology he used or the implications he has drawn are valid. They seem to suggest that publishing in the so-called 40 top-tier US/Western journals identified by the Financial Times is the only way to salvation. We believe that following his recommendations would direct Indian management scholars in a wrong

direction. Publishing in those journals would require writing for their audiences and contexts and using their theories and methods, which may not serve Indian management research well in the long run. To us, his analysis does not add any insight other than the fact that he think Indian management scholars should imitate Western models without any question. We argue that we need to establish our own top-tier journals to promote rigorous and relevant management research on India.

In 2011 Summer, a group of five management scholars from both India and overseas felt that it would be a worthwhile idea to take stock of Indian management research and explore future directions by showcasing a symposium at the second Indian Academy of Management Conference hosted by IIM Bangalore in December 2011. They included: Dr Pawan Budhwar, Aston Business School, UK; Dr Naresh Khatri, University of Missouri, USA; Dr Abhoy Ojha, IIM Bangalore; Dr Vasanthi Srinivasan, IIM Bangalore; and Dr Arup Varma, Loyola University, USA. The main issues of the symposium reflected several of the concerns that have been raised earlier in this note. The initial list of questions that set the pace for developing the symposium proposal included the following: (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 emphasising 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?

Following are the short presentations by the symposium members, addressing the questions raised above. Each presentation reflects their unique strengths, passions, and yes, their biases.

Abhoy K. Ojha: the current state of Indian management research and future directions

Several eminent 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 exhortations is that if only researchers in India could replicate the research practices that have already been established 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 want 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. I argue that 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 reasons for the current condition 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 ethos 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 few faculty members in management schools in India devoted significant energies towards original research and were happy to borrow knowledge developed outside the Indian context. The limited research efforts that were undertaken were further hampered by inadequate training, lack of interest in conducting research (which was related to local research being not valued), and also a lack of incentives in the Indian system to support and/or reward research. But most important, in my view, was the lack of confidence in the Indian researcher to assert his/her stand if it did not conform to the received wisdom from the developed world.

The lack of confidence is rooted in the system in which an Indian researcher has to operate. As indicated above, very few people pursued original research but even those few did not find the necessary support system to flourish. All societies have their own challenges, and researchers are motivated by the need to develop knowledge related to them and ultimately assist in the process of addressing the challenges. As a result, the focus of the research and the appropriateness of the methods of enquiry are agreed upon by a community of scholars who are pursuing research related to a family of challenges (Kuhn, 1970). Hence, it is quite natural for the 'gate-keepers' of knowledge in the West to reject research that does not conform to certain accepted norms and does not make sense to them. But it is unfortunate that the so-called 'gate-keepers' of knowledge in India, largely trained in reputed institutions of the West, also find it difficult to appreciate indigenous knowledge creation since the issues of interest and the methods do not conform to the norms acceptable in the West. Ironically, many of the 'gate-keepers' of management journals are wedded to notions of 'universal' knowledge and are not even aware of the philosophical flaws in their assumptions as applied to the social sciences (Fay, 1994; Taylor, 1994). 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.

I argue that research on management in India conducted by researchers from outside the country, much of it by people of Indian origin, also leaves a lot to be desired. Just like the 'gate-keepers' mentioned above, most researchers from outside India assume that conceptual frameworks developed in their current, mainly Western, contexts are universal in nature and hence applicable in any context, including India. I believe that while some universal concepts and frameworks may have relevance to the Indian context, there is a need to revisit the ontological and epistemological assumptions, and revise them for our context. Since meaning is at the core of social research (Taylor, 1998), there are severe limitations to obtaining

meaningful research outputs with theories and paradigms that are based on assumptions that may be invalid in India (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Further, research on India may be related to publishing pressures for tenure and reputation in the context of a researcher's country of employment. India seems to be next 'hot' context for management research, just like China was for some time (and still is) and Japan was in the 1970s and 1980s. I believe that it is dangerous for scholars who care about genuine knowledge on management in India to join the bandwagon to imitate Western paradigms of research, if relevance to India rather than publication in a highly ranked journal, is an important criterion.

Arun Maira, Member of the Planning Commission, Government of India, in his inaugural speech at the Eastern Academy of Management International Conference (2011) hosted by IIMB, argued that the 'wheel of progress' in the West is broken, and needs to be reinvented for our context for us to develop our own indigenous models of inclusive and sustainable growth. Similarly, I believe that it is critical for us to reinvent the wheel of indigenous management research to support our own development models. Given the current state of the economies in the West, and the known negative impact on the environment and communities of development models of the past, the time is right for Indian researchers to assert themselves and be read and heard. There is a need for those who are uncomfortable with alien research practices and theories to take a stand just like Feyerabend (1998) had urged scholars to defend society against totalising science that hurt free thought.

Three streams of research on management in India

The philosophy of social sciences suggests several criteria that may be used to accept a theory or research stream as meaningful (Kuhn, 1998). I will focus on three types of criteria – (i) Correspondence, (ii) Consistency, and (iii) Practicality or Relevance. Correspondence criteria examine the extent 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 assess the extent 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 themselves 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 favour 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 categorised 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 Ahmedabad. It emphasises 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. Over time this almost led to the abandonment of any effort to create, nurture, or discover indigenous knowledge.

I argue that while this stream of research has served the field of management and the country well, it is time for management scholars to move on as the conditions in the country today are different from the early days. We need to be able to generate our own knowledge to deal with our unique problems.

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 emphasised consistency with the dominant paradigms (in the West) and underemphasised 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.

I argue that if relevance to the Indian context is important, it may be short-sighted to adopt 'Western' paradigms without examining their ontological and epistemological assumptions as they may provide meaningful outputs in the West, but their ability to provide meaningful outputs for the Indian context is questionable. We should be able to create an environment in which the need for consistency with Western research paradigms does not kill efforts to conduct research that has greater correspondence and relevance in India.

Nostalgic research

The third stream is what I call 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. The Centre for Human Values at IIM Calcutta may be associated with this stream. 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.

I argue that there is need for this stream to focus more on the present and also prepare itself for contemporary critiques from other paradigms, just like Ayurveda has succeeded in creating space for itself in the domain of medicine. Ayurveda is based on fundamentally different ontological assumptions of the human body when compared to allopathic medicine. Due to the emphasis on adopting allopathic medicine, which was seen to be universal, Ayurveda suffered even in India. However, due to the efforts of a few courageous scholars who did not lose their confidence, and with the support of large sections of Indian society, Ayurveda has re-established itself in India and abroad. While Ayurveda scholars have remained loyal to their paradigm, they have addressed challenges from the allopathic paradigm by proving the efficacy of their medicine, using methods and tools that are considered legitimate by allopathic practices. Management scholars relying on traditional Indian knowledge need to emulate the Ayurveda scholars.

Conclusion: integration of three perspectives

I believe that research in and on India can benefit if there is an effort to create a platform for management knowledge

that integrates learning from all three streams described above. Each of them has 'deadwood' that needs to be cleared before application to the contemporary context in India. However, each of them also has a core that is absolutely essential for the same context. Hence, there is a need to foster 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 generating and sustaining 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 clamour 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.

Pawan Budhwar: The Indian Academy of Management: building opportunities for research

The Indian Academy of Management (IAM) has been created to provide a global platform for management scholars in India and elsewhere to network, collaborate, and conduct research on India. The booming economy and increasingly important geopolitical position of India, coupled with limited good quality research on India, is attracting attention from scholars all over the globe. As a result, lately, there has been a big surge in journal publications and books on India. Editors of leading journals and publishing houses, who were historically much less receptive to India, have begun showing keen interest in publishing research on India. Realising the need to support, acknowledge, and facilitate the creation and dissemination of Indian management research, Academy of Management, USA, in 2011 accepted IAM as one of its affiliates. Below, I propose how the IAM can (i) spearhead the creation and dissemination of knowledge on Indian businesses and organisations operating both within India and overseas; (ii) influence business and management policy and education; and (iii) act as a resource to develop the next generation of researchers.

As highlighted, there is a dire need for research on India that is both rigorous and relevant. This offers a huge opportunity and scope for the key stakeholders of management research in India like the academic institutions, funding bodies, publication outlets, practitioners, businesses, and organisations. Till now, 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. Accordingly, the tendency of the majority of these researchers has been towards the global homogenisation of management research leading towards convergence with the North American research paradigms. While these studies have found some relevance of such tools and concepts to the Indian context, both cross-

cultural management and institutional theorists have time and again stressed the need to study the research phenomena within specific contexts and with the help of context-relevant constructs and methodologies (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002). Ignoring the research context can both be misleading and disastrous (Schuler, Budhwar, & Florkowski, 2002). Further, research evidence from a number of cross-cultural management comparisons has constantly affirmed 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). Also, the majority of the leading Indian management institutions, to a great extent and perhaps due to good historical reasons, use similar textbooks to the ones used in North American and British business schools to educate and develop their management graduates. This raises the serious issue of relevance of such research and teaching, particularly, in the present dynamic Indian business context, which demands the creation of pluralistic and indigenous management scholarship in order to both improve and bridge the relationship between theory and practice by conducting context-relevant research (see Budhwar & Varma, 2011a). This means charting new and relevant territories and moving out of our current comfort zone to conduct more context-specific research with context-relevant constructs and frameworks. Indeed, this may be both a risky and a time-consuming proposition, but one worth pursuing in order to make a real impact and to establish solid foundations for management research that is pertinent to the Indian context. IAM has created the much needed platform to enable both overseas and India-based scholars to collaborate on such ventures. It can also act as an umbrella organisation to integrate sub-disciplines and facilitate cross-disciplinary research.

As IAM continues to evolve, it should be able to provide a range of useful and much needed avenues and services to its members. Examples of these can be: (i) building a strong and active community of scholars on India who can meet on a regular basis to share their findings, research ideas, proposals, and discuss challenges and how to meet them; (ii) establishing a journal on Indian management research for the creation and dissemination of knowledge on Indian businesses and organisations; (iii) linking with other professional bodies based not only in India but also globally such as the Academy of International Business; (iv) delivering developmental programmes for early career researchers (such as how to publish in leading journals or write research grants) and professional development programmes targeted at senior academics working in key research positions such as directors of research; (v) creating an active interface between academic scholars and practitioners via different network events and conferences; (vi) assisting academic institutions in developing their research ethics policies; (vii) being a repository of e-based literature; and (viii) acting as an interface between different India related research centres spread across countries.

Apart from the regular organising of the biennial conferences, IAM also intends to deliver regular development workshops in different regions of India, which will be targeted at new and up-coming management institutions, which lack a sound research base and infrastructure. It is

also hoped that experienced members of IAM will act as mentors to new promising researchers who, in turn, will mentor and develop scholars in their own institutions.

The last decade or so has witnessed an exponential increase in the number of management institutions/schools in India. While the market conditions support this, there are major concerns about their ability to deliver quality education and about their governance structure and systems. Recruiting organisations consistently complain about the lack of 'employable skills' in graduates from a large number of both new and old management institutions, indicating that their educational offerings are of dubious quality (e.g., Budhwar & Varma, 2011b). There is also a major ambiguity emerging related to the forms and functions of management institutions and business schools in India, which poses a significant challenge to their legitimacy. IAM, being a representative of the interests of management scholars and a bank of vast resources in the form of experiences and capabilities of its members, can help these institutions to sharpen their focus and improve their delivery and governance structures.

To conclude, the founding of IAM has provided management scholars interested in India an enormous opportunity to build an exciting and supportive community to create and disseminate knowledge that is highly relevant and rigorously tested and developed. (Details of IAM are available at www.indianaom.com.)

Naresh Khatri: Indian management research: the way forward

Indian business education and schools need to face the reality that the quality of teaching and classroom instruction depends largely on the body of knowledge on which it is based. The solutions to a number of management problems that Indian organisations face are likely to be quite different from North American organisations because of India's unique history, culture and social system, as well as India being in a different phase of development. Thus, Indian management research and teaching should lead to presenting to the world a style of management, which uniquely expresses the Indian socio-cultural heritage, combined with the current frontiers in management (Hofstede, 2007; Meyer, 2006).

Most Indian management institutions depend on curricula and materials developed elsewhere and have not developed an intrinsic capacity to respond and evolve to the changing needs of various sectors of industry and services, student interests, or the economy or society (Report of the Working Group on Management Education, 2007). For example, most theories of motivation stem from an individualistic bias and overemphasis on cognitive–calculative processes (Hofstede, 2007; Khatri, Tsang, & Begley, 2006). Selfish behaviour is assumed rational, even desirable, in Western management theory because of its individualistic orientation (Khatri, 2011). All these assumptions of individualist cultures are quite contrary to the Indian culture, which is more collectivist. Naturally, the question arises if Indian management educational institutions are doing a disservice to Indian society by

overreliance on Western books, theories and concepts that have not been tested and validated in the Indian context.

Indian management scholarship has to develop greater self-confidence. While it needs to have a healthy respect for Western scholarship, it would be counterproductive to follow it blindly. North American management research has its own problems. Currently a debate in North American research community is raging about its relevance to management practice (Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, & O'Brien, 2012; Ghoshal, 2005; Kieser & Leiner, 2009).

Flaw in the North American model

The rigour-relevance debate on the state of US management research has been gathering steam for some time now. We have been witnessing many scathing critiques of research published in the so-called top journals. For example, Ghoshal (2005) noted that 'bad management theories are destroying good management practices'.

Concerns about the academic rigour of business programmes in the USA in the 1950s prompted reviews by the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. These reviews concluded that the academic quality of business programmes was generally low. In response to this criticism, business schools adopted a more scientific model used by other academic disciplines such as the sciences and economics. Now the pendulum seems to have swung too much the other way. Management research seems to emphasise rigour at the expense of relevance.

Critics are now saying that business schools and management research lack relevance. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) argue that management research has almost exclusively promoted research methodologies from other hard disciplines like physics and economics. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) call upon management scholars to move away from the scientific model towards the professional or clinical model much like medical schools. They suggest that doing so 'entails focussing research on phenomena and problems of enduring importance, and building curricula that are evaluated, in part, by how well they actually prepare students to be effective in practicing the profession' (p. 93).

Pfeffer and Fong's (2002) study of the most influential business books revealed that only a small fraction of business books that influence management practice are written by academics. In 2001, only two of the top ten business books were written by academics. Rigby (2001) found that only seven of the 25 new management tools and techniques originated from academia. The rest were developed by management consultants and practitioners. Moreover, the management tools developed by academia had lower utilisation and satisfaction and a greater defection rate. In informal interactions with well-informed practitioners one can discern a sense of dissatisfaction, even disdain, for management research.

If the research published in the so-called top-tier management journals in the USA is as good as it is made out to be, it should pave the way to innovative solutions to the problems faced by organisations. Unfortunately, there is little influence that has flowed from the well-touted scholars of management to the industry (Mulla, 2007; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Practitioners do not seem to have

much confidence in the potency of current management theories in solving organisational problems. The rankings of business schools keep appearing in the media on a regular basis, creating a sense of awe about business schools and education but their basis appears to be questionable. In a single year, without any changes being made by schools, the rankings keep changing.

Navarro (2008) studied the MBA core curricula of the top-ranked US business schools and reported that these schools severely lacked the features that an ideal MBA programme should have. Specifically, he found that the top business schools fell well short in multi-disciplinary integration, experiential learning, soft skill development, providing a global perspective, and incorporating ethics and social responsibility in their teaching.

What should Indian management scholarship look like?

Meyer (2006) notes that Asian management research is trapped between apparently contradictory objectives of local relevance and international publication. One key finding of the Western management thought is that the proper application of any model, theory or management technique depends upon the situation or the context. Context is important for businesses as they develop their strategies and practices to fit specific cultures, legal frameworks, geographies, and industry structures. Research on management in India – and in consequence teaching at Indian business schools – often struggles to explain the realities of business in India. In particular, research agendas tend to be dominated by theories developed for Anglo-American contexts, which are insufficiently adapted to local circumstances. On the surface, firm behaviour may be sufficiently similar to allow Western theories to be tested and confirmed, yet this does not imply that the same variables are actually important in the local context (Meyer, 2006).

Asian business schools and their Indian brethren are eager to establish their reputation on the international stage, and to create incentives for their faculty to conduct better research. While these are highly desirable goals, biases arise when US schools are explicitly or implicitly used as primary benchmarks (Meyer, 2006). Since many university leaders are US-educated, their own prior experience forms the natural benchmark for the performance criteria they may set. US-style incentive schemes are introduced to govern particular recruitment and promotion procedures. Thus, a high emphasis is put on publications in top journals identified by US norms and on citations in databases such as the Social Science Citation Index. While objective and international, these criteria implicitly create incentives to write for US audiences, poorly serving the needs of businesses and organisations in Asia (Meyer, 2006).

There may be a good reason for the good standing of the US journals, for instance their methodological rigour. While it is natural that US institutions put the highest weight on US journals, it is highly problematic if Asian or European or Indian institutions adopt lists of top journals from US institutions, the kind of list that Kumar (2011) used in his study to assess Indian management research. Tsui (2004) expressed their major concern with such an approach.

Imposing US/Western management principles on Indian managers and workers may not elicit their best efforts. Instead, the attempts to root management principles in indigenous value systems may unleash the potential energy locked up in Indian managers and management systems (Gopinath, 1998).

What Meyer (2006) recommends for the Chinese scholarship makes sense equally for Indian scholarship. Meyer suggested that the Chinese researchers should develop indigenous discourses on organisational phenomena, loosely coupled with global debates on related phenomena. Such a loosely coupled agenda may require more self-confidence in pursuing an indigenous research agenda, and developing theoretical frameworks that address challenges faced by businesses in a researcher's own community. Similarly, March (2005) made important suggestions to the Chinese researchers that could apply equally to the Indian management scholarship. He noted that there are two vital contributions that the Chinese organisation research community can make to management scholarship. The first is delineation of the Chinese context. Second, studies in the Chinese context are also crucial to identification and elaboration of a context-free set of ideas.

Although early research of Indian organisations will undoubtedly be heavily influenced by a propensity towards North American training and orientation, Indian management scholarship will probably differentiate itself in important ways both from the current North American core and also from Europe and even from other Asian research such as China or Japan (March, 2005). Ultimately, studying Indian research will become as essential for North American scholars as studying North American research is now for Indian scholars (Hofstede, 2007).

Where to go from here?

Indian management scholarship needs to develop a unique research culture that fits its own circumstances. Learning from North American research is undoubtedly valuable but imitating it is not. We are not sure if the model that some of the universities in Asia, such as Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, National Taiwan University, National University of Singapore, and Indian School of Business, are following will serve Indian management education and practice well. The downside of the over-emphasis on rigour in the North American research model is quite obvious; it has lost relevance. I characterise such research as intellectual masturbation.¹ It is critical to strike the right balance between relevance and rigour. Kurt Levin's observation that there is nothing as practical as a good theory is very pertinent. Only by being relevant can we as management scholars stay ahead of practice rather than lag behind it and avoid fun being poked at business

¹ The Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) defines intellectual masturbation as fascinating intellectual breakthroughs regarding reality, language, existence, knowledge, perception, or human behaviour which are utterly without use, and therefore of no real consequence to anyone.

education in media commercials which say, 'Even an MBA can do it'.

The predominant emphasis of the Indian management institutions thus far has been on teaching; research has not received sufficient attention. This has hurt them in prestige because institutions elsewhere do not take them seriously. It must have affected the quality of their curricula and classroom instruction as well because the classroom instruction depends heavily, if not entirely, upon the body of knowledge on which it is based; if the instruction is based on out-dated theories or theories that are impertinent to the Indian context, it is likely to impart wrong education. To be world-class institutions, their commitment to both research and teaching excellence, not one or the other, is crucial. To excel in research and teaching will require a lot of effort in attracting the right faculty – rooted in Indian ethos and exposed to other societies and cultures.

The Indian institutions must develop an incentive system that rewards both relevance and rigour, but discourages imitation.

Research cannot prosper without a critical mass of scholarly community. Thus, establishing forums/conferences is paramount. The Indian Academy of Management can play a pivotal role in this aspect. Establishing management journals with competent editorial staff and review processes will be the key to boosting relevant and rigorous research. Needless to say, Indian institutions have to develop vibrant doctoral programmes.

It would take considerable personal courage and independence of thought for a researcher from the 'emerging markets' – or for an expatriate Western researcher – to suggest that Western theories and instruments may be wholly or partly inapplicable or irrelevant to the Indian circumstances (Hofstede, 2007; Meyer, 2006). Indian management research will have 'arrived' once indigenous Indian intellectual traditions become an integral part of the global scholarly discourse. This may appear a long way off, yet small changes in research agendas and university policies may generate rapid developments of scholarship, equalling the success of Indian business.

Indian management researchers should be more self-confident about the relevance of indigenous research, and not be unduly intimidated by the perceived expectations of US-based journal editors and reviewers (Meyer, 2006). Loose coupling with global scientific dialogues would enhance both local and global management knowledge (March, 2005).

Vasanthi Srinivasan: organisational change processes to stimulate research in Indian business schools

In recent years, there has been a great deal of focus, both in the popular press and in several reports on higher education on the need for more locally relevant, context specific research that can inform the global research from Indian business schools. As has already been mentioned, business schools in India were created primarily as teaching schools to develop managerial talent for independent India. The recruitment of faculty in many of these schools is based on their teaching skills. The institutional mechanisms of reward and recognition focus on teaching excellence and

the dominant identity of faculty members is their teaching identity. While this has served well in the past, for Indian business schools to feature in the global ranking of business schools, there is an urgent need to build a performance culture that nurtures and celebrates research.

Several reasons have been attributed for the non performance of business school faculty on research which range from lack of faculty competence, weak eco system to promote research, lack of good infrastructure to do research, funding constraints and finally, the lack of incentives for faculty to do research (Krishnan, 2010). While all these arguments have some merit, the key question that one needs to ask is, 'How does one build a research culture in an organisation where the DNA has historically been shaped by teaching?' At this stage, it must be understood that the role of teaching is not being undermined in any manner. While teaching has been in the foreground and research in the background in business schools for several decades now, the time has come for research to take centre stage and feature in the foreground in the immediate future. How do business schools in India manage this transition to a research culture? In particular, how can the Human Resource (HR) systems and processes in a business school enable this transition in an effective manner?

Most organisational change processes require changes in four HR systems – selection and socialisation, performance management, reward and recognition, and career growth and development systems.

Selection and socialisation of faculty

In building a research culture, the selection and socialisation of faculty is the easiest system to implement. Firstly, the criteria for selection of new faculty can be oriented towards research, thereby bringing in faculty whose research orientation is high. Their dominant 'self identity' as a researcher will have a spillover effect on the other faculty within the institution. If their socialisation is managed by research oriented faculty members, this will in the long run create a community of research focused faculty members and also a valuable peer community that will build confidence among faculty.

Performance management

Secondly, the performance management systems within the organisation play a critical role in the change process. Any institution attempting such a change will often have three categories of faculty – those whose incentive to change is the lowest (typically those who are retiring or are already recognised for significant expertise in teaching, administration, etc); those whose incentive to change is neutral (faculty who are comfortable with the existing culture and possess the competence to do research, but may lack the motivation to do so); and finally, those whose incentive to change is positive (faculty who have motivation, but may need support and mentoring to strengthen their competence). A base line data of the research interests and outputs of the entire faculty needs to be created.

The philosophy behind a robust performance management system in such a context is to enable and support

faculty to become research focused. This journey needs to commence with a management school-wide philosophy which explicitly articulates the changed expectations from the faculty. The institution needs to identify broad thematic areas as the thrust of research. These focal thematic areas need to be arrived at through a process of consensus building within and across the functional areas of management and the focus on India centred research, in particular, requires particularly careful planning and thought. This institutional thrust towards certain specific areas of management creates a group of researchers who can together build a programme of research, drawing up on each other's expertise. As Prof. Naresh Khatri has mentioned, since many faculty members in Asia are trained in the US schools, the benchmark for performance criteria in business schools in India often are the publications in the top journals as identified by the US norms or citation indices. Such criteria can vitiate all efforts at creating indigenous knowledge, which will require generating context specific insights loosely coupled with global debates on the related phenomena. It must be recognised that unbundling the contextual challenges and the institutional arrangements in complex and pluralistic countries like India will require a focused approach over several years to generate robust, relevant and rigorous theories.

Faculty whose interest lies in teaching or administration and do not have a research orientation may need to be counselled to focus exclusively on teaching and contribute to effective teaching in terms of cases, aids and tools that further teaching or focus on administration as the case may be. This would require the creation of distinctive tracks that allow faculty to specialise in different areas. There could be a teaching excellence track, a research excellence track, an administrative track and a 'balanced excellence' track (Krishnan, 2010). Allowing for different tracks provides an opportunity for faculty to identify and align their passion and interests in areas where they are most effective. This will ensure that existing business schools in India, who already have excellent teaching and administration oriented faculty, will be able to prudently invest their resources on the research oriented faculty and thus build their research capability. In the case of faculty who are neutral or positive, the institutional role in enabling faculty to become research oriented is much higher.

In most institutions, several faculties write articles regularly in various professional magazines, newspapers, and national level journals, chapters in books or in conference proceedings. All of these are indicative of a research orientation and a bias for dissemination of such knowledge. The need of the hour is to align such faculty to engage in more meaningful and deeper research and to contribute to peer reviewed journals which are in their domain of interest. In a recent faculty workshop held at IIMB, there was a discussion on what kind of support would be required by faculty who contribute at a national level, but have never contributed to international publications? Several faculty members mentioned that they were not aware of the journals in their field which encourage such context specific research. A number of faculty members mentioned that they were encouraging their Ph.D students to contribute to national level practitioner journals which enhanced their visibility within India. Within institutions,

there is a need for a group of faculty to acquire the capability to support faculty with ideas on which journal is likely to encourage a submission of the nature that the faculty is interested in. This role needs to be viewed differently from the role of a mentor, who provides personal support to individual research oriented faculty. (This will be discussed further in the last section.)

Profs. Abhoy Ojha, Pawan Budhwar and Naresh Khatri have made a compelling case for context specific research that builds scholarship in the field of Indian management. Such research stems from a need to generate new knowledge that would be valid, rigorous and relevant in the Indian context and at the same time aligns to the global research. The key to building an effective research culture is the goal setting process at the level of the institution and the individual. The organisational agenda for research has been discussed in the previous section. At the individual level, most institutions have teaching goals for their faculty. The research goals, however, need to be carefully integrated into the goal setting process. Teaching goals are often annual, aligned to the academic calendar of the institution. Research goals are often multi-year goals and at best, annually, can be milestones or work in progress. In the early years of building the research culture, it is likely that faculty may be unable to meet the goals if they were annual. Building expertise in any area and then demonstrating that expertise through publications in peer reviewed journals is likely to take 3–5 years. The ideal system would be therefore, for every faculty member to develop a yearly plan which provides the short-term focus and a 3-year-plan which will allow building expertise in an area of research interest of the faculty. While all that has been said is about creating a performance culture for research, the focus on relevant and meaningful research on Indian context requires further attention. The goals have to be reviewed periodically by a peer research review committee within the institution which will then provide feedback to the faculty, in particular on the relevance of the research to the dominant indigenous discourse. There will be a need for a multi-disciplinary research team which will draw up on the sociological, psychological, anthropological and economic peculiarities of the Indian context in creating and developing the locally relevant research.

Reward and recognition

Thirdly, the performance incentive for research at the level of the faculty is a key motivator to whether the research culture gets institutionalised. It is evident that incentive structures have the potential to change behaviours in institutions. If the intent is to generate indigenous knowledge, then such research in the early years of the change process has to be encouraged through the reward and recognition structures. Institutions should set aside seed funding for faculty members who want to undertake context specific research. Outputs of such funded research should be reviewed by external experts in the field and meaningful feedback needs to be provided to faculty. Those faculties, who, over a 3-year-period demonstrate proficiency in such research, need to be recognised with awards which can be monetary. All faculty who have progressed in the intended

direction of engaging in meaningful indigenous knowledge generation, can be supported through other initiatives such as providing funds to host special conferences, providing and supporting travel to 'bonus' conferences and finally, providing discretionary funds for research travel, appointment of researchers, procurement of aids that enable research etc. All of these extrinsic reward components need to reinforce the deeper value and belief structure both at the institutional and personal levels, which connects with 'the identity as a researcher'.

Career growth and development

Finally, as Prof Naresh Khatri mentions, if Indian researchers need to be more self-confident about their indigenous research and build personal courage, there is a need for a network of likeminded researchers who can mentor and support each other in generating indigenous knowledge and meaningful research. Within the mainstream research paradigm as it exists today, context specific researchers could carry with them deep self doubt and a belief that such deep context specific understanding is unlikely to be valued by the dominant research community. In such a situation, a network of context specific researchers, not necessarily from India, but from across the world could help build a community that can influence the global discourse in this field. In the initial stages of building the research culture, the existing faculty with strong research credentials will need to play a more proactive role in mentoring faculty and doctoral students. These institutions will need to find innovative ways of recognising such faculty who 'evangelise' the locally relevant context specific research which aligns to the larger global discourse.

To conclude, building capability to do context specific meaningful, relevant and rigorous research requires institutional support through the systems mentioned above, a peer support which is built through a network of academics who can mentor and provide critical feedback that will help build this knowledge and finally, personal courage which stems from a conviction about a deep understanding of the nuances of the context and the ability to frame this indigenous discourse in the context of the larger global discourse. This will require reflexivity, a learning orientation and finally a willingness to tread the uncertain goldmine of indigenous context based research.

Arup Varma: Indian research and global standards: not mutually exclusive

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Indian economy has grown steadily, with the result that India has established itself among the world's leading economies. Clearly, in order to sustain this growth, a country needs to continually produce and harness its talent. However, this is where India might soon (if not already) find itself lacking – as is well-known, India has exported its talent worldwide, albeit grudgingly, for decades. Indeed, the subject of 'brain-drain' was a common topic of discussion, with the corporate professionals

lamenting the lack of opportunities, and academics and scholars complaining about the lack of a 'research culture'.

Thankfully, there is some good news – with the tremendous growth of the Indian economy over the last 20 plus years, one has seen a 'reverse brain-drain', with many of those who chose to leave for foreign shores either moving back to India, or at least seriously considering such a move. A pleasant surprise is that many second-generation Indians (i.e., descendants of Indian immigrants) are actually moving to India to explore opportunities (some 100,000 in the year 2010 alone, per an Indian official quoted in the *New York Times*).²

Sadly, this reverse trickle is primarily limited to industry, with very few academics actually making the reverse move. (Ironically, even those that do, typically cite family reasons as the primary motivating force in the decision to move back to India – not any noticeable change in the research culture.)

This is indeed ironic, as one of the pillars of sustained economic growth is concurrent investment in research and development, as demonstrated by leading world economies such as the United States. Good research is what helps organisations improve processes and practices – and there are numerous examples worldwide whereby whole industries have fallen behind competitors due to a lack of timely research – the Indian automobile industry being a perfect example of this!

Management research

When it comes to management research, the growth of the Indian economy seems to have generated tremendous interest among scholars, as evidenced by the number of books and journal articles about India, and doing business in India, over the last several years. Indeed, leading international journals devoted to management have published special issues on India (see, e.g., [Varma & Budhwar, 2012](#)). However, the majority of these works have been authored by Indian scholars based in the West (see, e.g., [Budhwar & Varma, 2011b](#)), primarily in the United States and the United Kingdom. Given the number of management institutes in India, one would have expected there to be a deluge of publications authored by Indian scholars based in India. Even if we take a more focused approach and limit our discussion to the top management institutes in India, the number of publications emerging from these institutions is extremely low. I must confess – like most of my academic colleagues, I regularly skim the table of contents of the leading management journals, and am very disappointed to note that articles there by scholars based in India are few and far between. This is rather disheartening given that a number of faculty members at the top Indian business schools actually hold advanced degrees from the United States, and are thus well exposed and well trained in the research culture that is the hallmark of American academics – just glance through the faculty lists of the top 15–20 business schools!

² http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-04-17/news/31355364_1_brain-drain-brain-circulation-immigrants, retrieved April 17, 2012.

What ails Indian management research?

A number of critical and valid arguments have been put forward explaining the lack of research emerging from Indian management educators, and these have been discussed by my co-panelists on this round table. However, I would like to concentrate on an issue that, in my view, is one of the main impediments to publishing impactful research. Indeed, it is my humble opinion that the discussion of Indian versus US – model centric research hides the fact that for research to be meaningful and have an impact, it must stand the scrutiny of referees at the global level. In other words, we should not promote poor research by couching it as Indian research. Without a doubt, we need to develop models in India, for India, but these must meet global standards. Also, since most research in the management/psychology field has been done in American business schools, there is nothing wrong with attempting to learn from them and meet those standards, as it can only help the quality get better. Just take a look at the books being used in Indian business schools – most are published in the US, and authored by well-known scholars based in the US.

So, what do we need to do to raise Indian research standards, as far as management research is concerned? First, it should be noted that American research models themselves are not just ‘American’ in the strictest sense. A cursory review of academics in US management schools reveals that faculty in these schools come from all over the world and have similarly been trained by faculty from all over the world. Thus, in the truest sense, American models are global models.

Perhaps more importantly, the leading journals published in the United States adhere to strict and rigorous standards, thus ensuring that articles published therein meet the criteria of good research. This is where we currently seem to be lacking. Take a look at the list of leading management journals around the world (see www.harzing.com for a comprehensive listing) – how many Indian journals do you see there? Clearly, there is something missing – in my opinion, it is the level of rigour, both at the author and the editorial levels.

At the very least, we need to ensure that research being published in Indian journals is put through the same tests, i.e., the articles should follow guidelines commonly accepted (e.g., APA manual). This means Indian journal editors, reviewers, and authors must all set high standards, and not be content or supportive of work that is clearly not up to the mark. I understand that often the editor’s decision to accept articles is driven by the need to fill journal issues, and for the authors – the need to publish something, somewhere. Clearly, institutional policies and practices (e.g., appropriate (or inappropriate) compensation and support of research activities) play a significant role in the quality of research emerging from Indian management schools – and these are addressed elsewhere by my co-panelists.

Looking forward

So what is needed? First, management scholars should ensure that they produce only world-class research. One good way to ensure this is to submit manuscripts to

international journals. The reviews at leading journals are often extremely detailed and helpful, and can help guide authors in modifying their manuscripts to global standards. This should be relatively easy for senior scholars who do not have the pressures that junior scholars often face (publish or perish). In addition, senior scholars should mentor junior scholars and also convince administrators and the powers-that-be to insist on quality research, rather than quantity. Clearly, research that has no impact is not necessary and serves little purpose. In addition, junior scholars should seek out partnerships with senior scholars around the world to collaborate on and co-author research. This will help them publish in quality journals, as well as learn the ropes of publishing in international journals.

As is well-known now, many Indian business schools are offering monetary rewards to faculty for publishing in international journals – often linking the amount to the ranking of the journal where the article is published. I have seen many of these lists, and they rarely include any Indian journals – even when Indian journals are included on these lists, they are listed in the lowest category, thus providing little incentive for faculty to publish there. This practice, in itself, is clear admission by Indian schools that international journals (more, specifically American journals) are the standard that they are benchmarking. Clearly, offering monetary rewards is one way of promoting research – but unless these institutions provide the necessary infrastructure and create the right culture, they will not be able to create true scholars.

A word of caution here – seeking collaboration is not the same thing as requesting others to simply add one’s name on the paper. Similarly, when one does find a collaborator, one must hold one’s end of the deal, and make good faith efforts to do whatever is agreed upon. If not, it will send the wrong message about the attitude towards research and it also defeats the very purpose of learning through collaboration. There is of course a very fair way of seeking and achieving collaboration – and that is through a ‘quid pro quo’. Given the increasing importance of India on the world scene, numerous renowned scholars are interested in research on India. In these cases, they would often like to collaborate with someone on the ground, who can help with data collection and so on.

Conclusion

So, where do we go from here? First, rejecting so-called American models of research is missing the point. The models clearly need to be adapted for the Indian environment, but rejecting the very models is missing the wood for the trees. Let me use cricket to explain my point, given that it is often called a religion in India. No matter how many domestic tournaments a player has played, it is only when he excels in a global tournament that we start admiring him. For that matter, look at the number of people that show up to watch domestic tournaments (even the finals), and the limited television coverage given to those matches. Contrast that with all the hype around the world cup! Need I say more?

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