

Management Studies and inter-disciplinary research

What I would like to say is that what I'm saying is not really research-based but based on my experience and the various roles I have played over time: as a reviewer for journals, a teacher and supervisor of undergraduate and postgraduate research, a panelist at conferences, editor-in-charge of an international journal, evaluator of promotions, etc. Also, a sort of a qualification like Management is broad, and it has various sub-areas like finance, accounting, and business economics. So, I am not sure how fair I would be in making certain comments. I hope I cover most of them.

Question 1: What are the acceptable/typical methodologies in your discipline?

I would say that for quite some time, our field was very positivist in research, because that was accepted and thought of as the only scientific way of doing research. We also had a lot of influence from psychology. Especially in the West, a lot of the management researchers were trained as psychologists, so in terms of methodologies, experiments, quasi-experiments and survey methodologies were being used. But as in the example I have shown here [on the slide], which is a paper by Morgan and Smircich, there was a push in the 1980s towards the qualitative approach, not just in terms of method but in terms of ontology, epistemology, the qualitative approach of social construction, interpretive, post-modern, postcolonial, feminists and such approaches. But it took a long time for it to get accepted in our field in the early stages because the traditional, positivistic journals did not accept qualitative research. So, there were journals that were started for qualitative research which have quite a lot of acceptance now. Even in our Faculty [of Management and Finance], you will see an equal number of researchers producing qualitative and quantitative research.

Question 2: What are the accepted research output in our field?

If I look outside of Sri Lanka, mainly the first step would be a conference paper – which is always encouraged because you get a lot of feedback – which is then revised, and published in journals. You would see that in top journals, there will always be a footnote saying that this is a revised version or improved version of this paper presented in a conference. But in Sri Lanka, not all practice this approach of first presenting to a conference and then a journal publication. Quite a lot of people go on to journal publications straight away.

Question 3: At what stages of the research study are they published/disseminated?

I will combine the stages and the type of publications together. In terms of PhD students, sometimes it's part of the program requirement that they publish their conceptual paper first and then their structured literature review and so on. In terms of stages, you will see that at various stages they do these publications and nowadays,

there are also PhD programs by publication where each of the chapters is an article. These are gaining popularity. So, you would see those publications at those stages as well. In terms of types of research that is being published, you will see empirical vs conceptual papers; and then review papers based on the structured literature reviews that people do. We also see meta-analysis, not too much in numbers, but we do see methodological papers on what to do and what not to do in other countries. In some countries, based on empirical research, quite a lot of academics publish case studies as well, especially those who follow the Ivy League tradition of conducting MBA programs. In those universities, you will see a lot of case studies – but it's not very popular in Sri Lanka. Another type is applied research. Even in our Faculty, for SLQF level 6, it is compulsory to do research. So, we have given our students an option of doing basic research or applied research. You do see applied research also in other countries as well as in Sri Lanka.

Question 4: Why have these conventions evolved as such?

I really don't know. But for me, in terms of why I follow these conventions, it is what I learnt from my postgraduate studies, what our supervisors taught me, the discussions we've had, what I have seen. So, things are sort of passed down. And as I said, in terms of publications or dissemination at different stages, sometimes it's also a degree requirement.

Question 5: Do you see any threats to research in your discipline?

Yes, very much! Especially in Sri Lanka, I see a *big* threat to research publications in my discipline. The main one is predatory publications and conferences. It's a threat because it doesn't really go through rigorous or any review at all. And it's fee-based publications – so in those types of publications, you will see that it lacks rigor, what they have said they will do is not what they have really done and lots of issues. The other form of threat is where you see salami publications – multiple publications by just changing a few things which leads to a lot of self-plagiarism. Plagiarism is another threat. In my current role as editor-in-chief of a journal, I reject quite a lot of manuscripts that are submitted to our journal because they display a lack of rigor in research, e.g., in terms of sample size and analysis or the conceptual model not making sense. In addition, plagiarism and self-plagiarism are also big issues.

I always encourage people to do research where they actually make a contribution. It doesn't have to be novel, but there should be some contribution to fill in the gaps of our knowledge. But you will see that there is research that is being published or presented where there is actually no significance or contribution made to knowledge because it can be a replication, or about relationships and causalities we already know about. So, they are not really making a contribution.

Another issue I see is that people don't use theory, whether using it as a framework or a lens like in qualitative research, or to use theory to develop their hypotheses to the theoretical contribution in positivistic research. So basically, the lack of theory in research.

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Reference

Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The case for qualitative research. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(4), 491-500.