

Knowledge, culture and management research

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At first, Management Studies evolved as a separate discipline simply to study the business managers in action and the catchword was the managerial effectiveness.

Tracing the genealogy of the discipline takes us to the historical site of mid-19th century America where the organizational form of American business evolved from small family-run firms to large complex enterprises which relied increasingly on the division of labour. The evolution of different approaches and models employed to study the managers in action since then in line with the changing emphasis of concern reveals how it acquires a wider scope and shedding some of its birthmarks. In the first half of the 20th century the scientific approach in management dominated the discipline with the writings of F.W. Taylor.

Working within the positivist framework, his quest was to find the fundamental principles of efficiency. Concept such as skills of observation, quantification, analysis, experimentation and evaluation came to parlance in management research with the scientific school.

The process approach, often identified as classical view, emphasized the managers role is to forecast and plan, to organize, to command to coordinate and to control. The human relations approach, supported by the Hawthorne experiments, is partly a pendulum reaction against the seemingly impersonal feature of the scientific approach. Elton Mayo, a pioneer in field experiments in management research, found that the needs and limitations of workers such as rest periods, social interaction of the job and relationship to superiors were critical elements in their productivity.

With the application of quantitative approaches and the systems approach after the Second World War, the concept of 'management science' came into parlance and set the tendency of management research to become more technical.

It is important to emphasize that theoretical approaches and models do not stand in vacuum. All the models come with definite political projects. It is necessary to understand the political undertone of the model. If you do not hear this political echo either you are dumb or your model is really sterile. Let me take some development models as examples. The emphasis of the increase in output by the technocratic economic growth models and the income redistribution by the reformist social development

models or the emphasis of restructuring society by the transformational power relationships model emanate from specific political projects which entail definite political agenda. My emphasis on the need to understand the political overtone of theoretical/analytical models does not mean that I am averse to models. They are useful heuristic constructs employed for explanatory purposes. In discussing the use of models as heuristic constructs in the social sciences, Karl Deutsch lucidly identified their three-fold functions. Firstly, models perform an organizing function relating systems to one another and give us an idea of the whole system and how it is organized. Secondly, models perform explanatory function

reporting and auditing. When we are compelled to posit our analysis in a broader socio-political and cultural matrix, how do we confine narrowly the management research to the study of business managers in action? Can we ignore political management, economic management and management of ethnic relations or at least these dimensions in management research?

The answers to these questions take us to my second assertion, namely, the broadening of the scope and parameters of management research compiles us to enter the theoretical discourses of new intellectual movements. The cultural context of the production and distribution of knowledge received more attention in this context. Knowledge is developed in a specific cultural context.

lization prior to the 13th century. It was through the management of water that hegemony was exercised during this period. Theoretically, the ruler claimed to be the owner of the land of the kingdom but for all practical purposes, the tiller owned the land.

In this context, water, and not the land, was the basis of the socio-political hegemony of rulers. Along with the extensive irrigation systems, a sophisticated water management system with corresponding social order was developed. Senarath Paranavitana discussed the role of the 'Kuleenas, those who performed the managerial functions, in the maintenance of the hydraulic civilization of ancient Sri Lanka. The method of collecting dakapathi and bhojakapathi reveals how the taxation system that accompanied the water management



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system. It goes without saying, however, that we cannot go back to the past. But, the insights that we gather from the study of indigenous knowledge systems would definitely help setting the guidelines for the future. In Japan, the way the traditional concept of family has been integrated into the

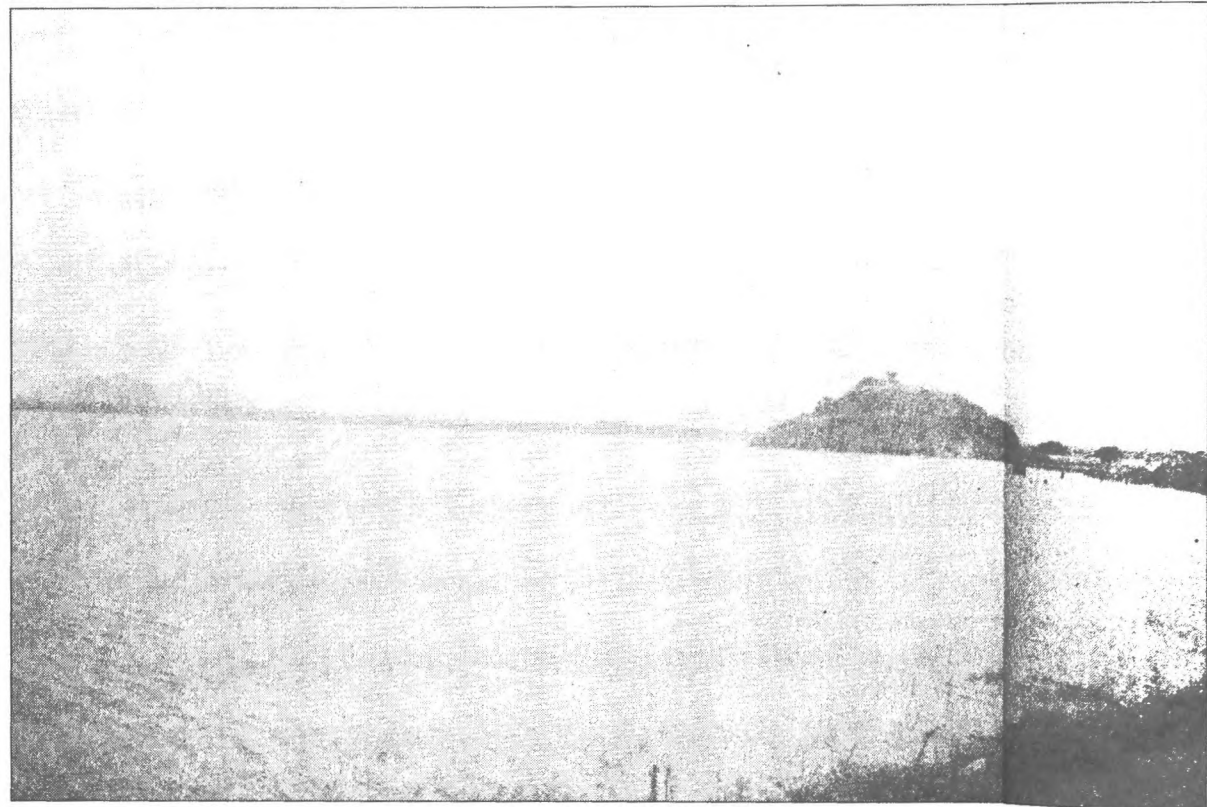
Their paradigmatic critique was directed mainly towards the Cartesian theory of epistemological subjectivity, first to its philosophy of identity and second to its account of knowledge. Cartesian philosophy of identity is premised upon the exclusion of the 'other.'

This omission of the 'other' in the analysis is a result of the desire to always see the world in its own image and its indifference to difference. Similar epistemological issues relating to subjectivity and interpretation and images of world were discussed in Indian philosophical discourses in the 5th century B.C. and later. Therefore, issues in the present post-structural discourses are not really novel to the philosophical thinking of our part of the world.

Finally, as members of university academic community, what should we do in this juncture? We are compelled to pay more serious attention to the epistemological issues relating to our own disciplines. The contents and parameters of disciplines and heuristic constructs we employed in explanatory purpose have undergone a profound change during the last two to three decades due to the advances in social science research and theoretical discourses generated by diverse new intellectual movements.

I consider it the duty of university academics to traverse across these discourses and grasp new trends in the construction of knowledge and view them critically and independently to promote excellence in higher education, to provide intellectual leadership to the students and to the society at large.

To conclude, may I quote Antonio Gramsci. He says, 'Every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher. But the educational relationship should not be restricted to the field of strictly scholastic relationship by means of which the new generation comes into contact with the old and absorbs and develops a personality of its own which is historically and culturally superior.' Are we ready to shoulder this responsibility?



An example of Lanka's tank civilization

and point out, in somewhat simplified manner, how a given system operates. Thirdly, they enable us to predict outcome actions and events.

The more important challenge is how to locate the conventional components of inquiry and the categories of analysis in the newly discovered theoretical planes. Let me take the case of accounting. Accounting is the language of business. The recent theoretical studies on language and communication research and related discourses made conventional boundaries of the discipline increasingly redundant.

Language is the tool which shape the ideas and thought processes; but it is not a one-way process. Human kind individually and collectively shapes the language too. It is done in a broader socio-political and cultural matrix. To cite an example, Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, particularly his notion of four validity claims implicit in any speech act, is employed in the analysis of financial

The reproduction of cultures entails how people organize their experience conceptually so that it can be transmitted as knowledge from one generation to another. Ethnicity is not only a collective identity but also a repository of knowledge. As such, knowledge is nothing but a construct of culture in a particular politico-historical context. Hence, the perception of reality is also a social and cultural construct. When we discuss the importance of culture the production and distribution of knowledge we must pay attention to the concept of indigenous knowledge systems. The positivist school and the modernization approach ignored the value of this crucial aspect. It is essential for the managers, in business, in politics and in any other area, to take into consideration the accumulated knowledge and traditional skills and technology of the people among whom they operate.

May I take the case of the management and the taxation system in the hydraulic civil-

system operated. The significance of the management of water was highlighted by the fact that the collapse of the Rajarata civilization and subsequent drift of the seat of the political power to the southwest of the island, according to Rhodes Murphey and Senarath Paranavitana, was mainly due to the annihilation of the Kuleenas, the managerial class, and the collapse of the management system that was necessary to maintain the extensive irrigation order. The water management was not a technical affairs at all and it was a cultural phenomenon.

The prevention of water pollution and its excessive use and the maintenance and protection of water resources were linked with rituals and cultural beliefs. In the final analysis, the management of the water system was determined by the culture and rituals. Serious attention must be paid to identify the principles and the mechanisms inherent in that management system which was the hallmark of our indigenous knowledge

business; organizations provides a good example.

The Management Studies really cut across disciplinary boundaries. The process of human inquiry, according to Habermas, can broadly be grouped into three categories: Empirical-analytical sciences, Historical-hermeneutic sciences and Critical oriented sciences. To quote Habermas "The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a practical one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporated the emancipatory cognitive interests". The Management Studies, I think, need to traverse between these categories. Management itself is not a technical but a cultural process.

The ideological roots of the present anti-Cartesian veer Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard could be traced back to a long line of thinkers stretching for Martin Heidegger, and Theodor Adorno to Max Horkheimer.