

**PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH PARADIGMS: ROLE OF PRAGMATISMIN
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT

Strategic management is a discipline that covers the domains and theories related to multiple fields of management. The multi-disciplinary nature of this field shows its significance and importance of research developments and contributions to the world. With the increasing interest of the researchers in this field, extensive in-depth studies were conducted bringing in new dimensions and convergence of thoughts and practices in strategic management. Though the strategic management society has worked for the integration and review of the research work in this field, it lacks behind in giving due attention to the philosophical debate over research paradigms used in strategic management research. This article gives an overview of the research paradigms and how they are being used in strategic management, which paradigm is dominating and how other paradigms can add to the body of knowledge of strategic management. Thus it can be used by the researcher to think critically about what to focus on while doing research in this field, how to move about further with the research question to give some possible solutions to the problems.

Keywords: strategic management, philosophy, pragmatism, research paradigms

INTRODUCTION

Strategic management compared to other fields is relatively young. Its inception is traced back to 1960's, however the maximum contribution is during 1990's. During 1980's use of different statistical and econometrics research methodologies in strategic management lead towards the excessive development and research contributions of this field. Strategic management covers the different strategic-decision making activities taking place in an organization. It involves the systematic organization of the initiatives taken to achieve the targeted goals (Pettigrew, 2002). Researchers systematized the evolution of strategic management, explaining the historical development, dominant theories of the field, evolution of sub fields, intellectual structure and development at international strategic level. Strategic management researchers are currently having debates on the methodological issues involved in the research of this domain (Dzwigol, 2020; Cinici & Dagnino, 2015). The methodological aspect is an angle of paradigms debate, which is integral for the integration and building foundation of the subject. The discussion on paradigms and its contributions towards field of strategic management is important for the future development of the field. It will bring valuable scientific directed contributions that are practical and beneficial for the organizations. However in strategic management research it has been given less attention. A few articles discussed the paradigms of realism, constructivism, critical realism being dominating the strategy research (Mir & Watson, 2000; Miller & Tsang, 2010) but extensive philosophical debate is missing. These papers discuss the two paradigms i.e., realist and constructivist primarily and to some extent the critical realist. However, discussion on pragmatism and its contributions to research on strategic management is entirely missing.

Strategic management field expansion can be attributed to four main factors i.e., increase in the number of topics addressed in the research (Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999), extensive use and discussions on the research methodologies used, bringing in more rigor and varieties of analysis (Ketchen, Boyd, & Bergh, 2008), the increasing trend of having reviews and taking measure to bring in convergence in definitions and key concepts of strategic management. According to these two research studies by Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin (2012) and Nag, Hambrick, & Chen (2007) having employed different approach and context identified seven key components of the concept of strategic management: performance, firms, strategic initiatives, environment, internal organization, managers/owners and resources, and lastly, the interest of researchers, international cooperation have increased to bring in global integrated view to core concepts of strategy.

Strategic management journal has published a Special Issues for Reviews of Strategic Management Research (January 2017) and Question-Based Innovations in Strategy Research Methods (January 2016) to have some debate about the theoretical grounding in strategic management and to comprehensively gives the methodological overview of the research done in strategic management. It also helped in exploring the new methodological approaches that have been used. They are just reviewed; no discussion is carried out on how they have benefited the field of strategic management and what are the prospects. The methodology is just one aspect of the philosophical research paradigms that are followed by researchers. The research in this field, lacks some comprehensive paper on comparative analysis of

philosophical research paradigms in the field of strategic management. Research paradigms are different ways how researchers view the world and its phenomenon. Researchers' beliefs and assumptions about reality, sources of knowledge and way of scientific investigation describes the paradigm they follow (Kuhn, 1970; Davies & Fisher, 2018). Research paradigms are classified as positivism, constructivism, pragmatism, and critical realist. Positivism view the world as single truth and existing independent of our knowledge about that (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Constructivism belief in multiple realities, which is socially constructed and can change. Contrary to positivism and constructivism, realism considers the perceptions as having plasticity, therefore difference between reality and people's perception can exist (Bisman, 2002). Context and surroundings play a significant role in knowledge of reality i.e., social conditioning. However, pragmatism start with the research question. It will determine the research framework and so on. They view the paradigms as continuum (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Researchers tried to distinguish between these paradigms. However, the paper by Mir & Watson (2000) lacks the clear distinction of constructivism rather it count out for critical realism. In the reply by Kwan and Tsang (2001) to the earlier paper, critique is based on just one author basis, Boyd, and his work is being discussed rather than having this debate on some logical points. The issue of subjectivity in constructivism is highlighted, however in realist as well the questionnaires and instruments developed and responded are subjective. They present their understanding and differentiation of different types of realist paradigms (dogmatic realist, critical realist) and make it similar to constructivism, to support their point. Similarly, another article by Miller and Tsang (2010), supports the philosophical paradigm of critical realist to test the management theories. But the social phenomena are too complex to be explained by just one paradigm. At times in certain situations, the reality is socially constructed and needs to be studied from that particular angle to explain and understand it for example cross-cultural differences. Therefore constructivism can also be used for theory testing (grounded theory, content analysis, ethnography, etc.). A discussion is required based on reviews that have been carried out related to strategic management research, giving an overview of which paradigm is followed extensively by the researchers and which one can contribute further to this field and how.

Based on the above analysis, this article is to facilitate and open up new horizons for the researchers in the field of strategic management so that they can contribute to the field theoretically giving better, reliable, valid explanations of the reality. The discussion would be carried out in the following sections, (1) research in the strategic management domain, a brief overview, (2) major paradigms followed in strategic management research (3) comparison of paradigms adopted in strategic management with those not adopted (4) the way forward-questions unanswered by existing paradigms.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategic management has evolved over the last 50 years, the foundation exists mainly in the pivotal publications by Chandler (1962), an off (1965), and Andrews (1971). Since then it evolved and many new insights, perspectives emerged. It gives rise to bring in different

streams of research within the field resulting in expansion along with converging ideas. The origin of strategic management can be attributed to economics but it was accepted as an academic field in business schools in the 1970s. As the demand for policy instructors increased it led to the introduction of the doctoral program as well in policy and strategy. The field expanded as more integration between research, policy, teaching, and management practices took place (Schendel & Hofer, 1979). The research in the field of strategic management flourished as more infrastructural development took place like Business Policy and Strategy Division was established by the Academy of Management in 1981, journals like Strategic Management Journal and Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (now in FT 50) introduced, and Strategic Management Society established.

The primary streams investigated during the start of strategic management research were relationships between context (especially industry structure), strategy, and performance-driven by industrial organization economics (backed by theories and concepts of microeconomics, scale, and scope, agency theory, transaction cost theory, etc. in 1980's rigorous research work started and a variety of theoretical and methodological tools were applied. As a result, new areas of research emerged like inter-organization relationships (competitive and cooperative strategies), organizational capabilities (dynamic capabilities, value frameworks, etc.), knowledge management (intellectual capital, creation, innovation, diffusion, etc.), behavioral strategy, corporate social responsibility, etc. (Durand, Grant, & Madsen, 2017).

The scope of strategic management studies has expanded due to the extensive availability of data, rigorous and multiple methodologies i.e., qualitative and quantitative, analytical techniques. Many reviews on the scope of research in the strategic management field have concluded a few major streams, line of work i.e., organization theory, the concept of strategy, process models (decision making), and resource-based view (Nerur, Rasheed, & Natarajan, 2008). The strategic management widening domain encroached the research in business and management of other sub-areas. It intruded into the field of international business, technology management, Human resource management (strategic HRM), organization design and structure, business ethics, entrepreneurship (strategic entrepreneurship), organizational behavior, etc. (Hambrick, 2004). The grey area has between management and strategic management has increased (Bettis, Ethiraj, Gambardella, Helfat, & Mitchell, 2016).

Currently crisis management and response to international crisis is a key area in strategic management research (Wenzel, Stanske, & Lieberman, 2020). Further, education and industry linkages is another important domain for e.g., identifying linkages of strategic management with higher education strategies, identifying the gaps between skill set of graduates (Eeslay and Lee, 2021) and what employers require. Similarly, research focus on strategic measure taken by university via its programs to instill the skills for entrepreneurship (David, David & David, 2021). Strategic management research developed towards the field of public sector and public service as well (Ongaro, Sancino, Pluchinotta, Williams, Kitchener, & Ferlie, 2021).

Research in the field of strategic management is synthesized through systematic reviews and meta-analysis. The gradual increase of research in this field added up to more meta-analytical articles. Systematic reviews in sub fields of strategic management explains its importance in domain of health sector (Rasouli, Ketabchi, Khiinsari, Ashia, Ardalan, Saraee& Ahmadi, 2020), environment-industry interaction (Susur, Hidalgo &Chiaroni, 2019) and theory development and application as well (Soltani, Shahbazim Ahmadian, Hamidzadeh, 2019). This signifies the development in the field along with the need to use multiple paradigms to have maximum contributions. It will enhance the understanding of the discipline and bring in more research-based solutions to the issues faced by managers carrying on strategic planning and management. Therefore, it is important to have a comparative analysis and debate on use of different paradigms in strategic management research to better understand that which paradigm is missing, why and how development in this field can be enhances.

RESEARCH PARADIGMS USED IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategic management theory is not developed by the scientific progression, whereby the theories are built upon knowledge which replaces each other to get some core concepts and definitions bringing integration and overarching frameworks, rather new streams emerged which were not replacing/ reconcile the existing theories thus lacking the embeddedness in some frame(Durand, Grant, & Madsen, 2017). Different scholars give a different view about the lack of integration in strategic management research even though most work has been in positivist and realist paradigm.

According to a study byGuerras-Martín, Madhok & Montoro-Sánchez (2014), quantitative has helped in the identification and measurement of specific variables, determining causality, facilitating the objective approach of research.

Strategic management evolution is explained via the dual pendulum approach (a term introduced by Hoskisson et al. (1999) (Guerras-Martín, et al., 2014). One criterion was that the success of the firm was attributed to internal factors and few researchers attributed it to the external environment (SWOT Analysis). The other criterion was the level of analysis i.e., micro-individual level and macro-organizational level. This tension led to the development of theories and research in strategic management from the 1980's till now. Table explains theories that evolved as per this classification. The pendulum metaphor denotes that focus of attention in both criteria swings between the two extremes. This joint and continuous movement shows the complexity of the strategy field. Therefore to understand the issues, strategic management research is needed to focus on a variety of tools, techniques, methodologies, approaches to reply to the new issues.

Table 1: *Evolution of Theories and contribution towards Strategic management Research*

Time Period (Yrs)	Theories
1970-80	Industrial Organization
1980-90	Agency Theory Transaction cost economics Resource Based view
1990-2000	Knowledge based view Resource Orchestration
2000- current	Institutional Approach Behavioral strategy/Micro foundation

Lack of integration in the theory of strategic management shows a lack of “shared theoretical beliefs, values, instruments, and techniques, and even metaphysics” (Bird, 2013). Strategic management does not possess any specific research program, theories that are governed by some methodological rules (Durand, Grant, & Madsen, 2017). Durand et.al. (2017), have given a matrix based on the review of articles, which shows that where the subfields of the strategy exist based on their consistency in empirical measurement(high-low) and shared agreement over causal relationships(high-low). Based on this a dominant paradigm would be the one having high consistency in empirical measurement and shared agreement over causal relationship meaning that means a positivist paradigm is the desirable one. However it is accepted that an overall dominant paradigm must not be wished for, rather a solution to the complex problems, drawing concepts, theories should be ensured for continuous progress and development of the field.

Studies have been conducted to identify the theoretical and methodological bases over the history of strategic management. Early work was based on the contingency and resource-based framework (Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999). Vargas-hernández, Pérez, & Córdova-Rangel (2016), concluded that strategic management research has varied from pure quantitative methods having SEM, regressions, and other mathematical models to qualitative methods like ethnography, case studies, etc. They have been used for theory building in this field. There is an increasing trend of mixed-method approach in strategic management research projects (Judge & Zeithaml, 1992). However, the growing approach of bringing theoretical novelty in strategy has hindered the synthesis and integration of knowledge (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012). Future research needs to have integration of multiple theoretical and empirical complex models that are supported by statistical tools and techniques like SEM (structural equations modeling) and multinomial logit analysis (Vargas-hernández, Pérez, & Córdova-Rangel, 2016). Such proposals by researchers highlight to move

the strategic research more towards the realist approach rather than any other paradigm. However, this gives a biased view of the researchers in the field of strategic management in favor of using the realist approach. Therefore, the comparative analysis is given ahead to have a better understanding of the pros and cons of each paradigm and its possible contribution towards research in strategic management.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR PARADIGMS- STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Philosophical debates on the paradigmatic foundations and stance of strategy research have always remained important (Nonaka, 1998; Spender, 1996). Extensive debates on the different layers of research onion (e.g., inductive and deductive approach), the role of Kuhn paradigms and Popper's falsification theory in hypothesis structuring (Seth & Zinkhan, 1991), and the text-based nature of the research have taken place to understand the inherent philosophical assumptions of strategy research (Bauerschmidt, 1996). The good researchers always want to make their paradigmatic assumptions clear while conducting research.

The realist paradigm has been dominating the field of strategy research (Godfrey & Hill, 1995; Scherer & Dowling 1995). In a recent study by Weiss, (2017), the interest in the study of ethics and CSR has increased among researchers, but the existing method still focused on quantitative as compare to qualitative methods; the ethical domain focused more on descriptive while CSR has moved forward and has a more normative orientation. CSR normative nature must be considered before adopting a particular method and following a paradigm as it is having a larger impact on society. Besides CSR, stakeholder engagement, perception is all studied by using quantitative methodologies (Midin, Joseph, & Mohamed, 2017). To investigate the role of ethics in corporate governance realist paradigm is followed (Müller, Turner, Andersen, Shao, & Kvalnes, 2016)

The unobservable are tapped down by the realism that cannot be considered by the positivist paradigm. Similarly, the taxonomies and models developed in strategic management like Porter (1980), Miles & Snow (1978), they are developed through assumptions of realism. They are operationalized but they are unobservable. The realist paradigm has significant contributions towards strategic management research because they are theory-based, they always investigate truth on this basis. It ensures predictive validity. It claims to be moving towards universal laws like generalizations that are based on some strong grounds of reality (Liplen, 1984).

In comparison to that, the constructivist paradigm is considered as having more potential to explore strategy research (Mir & Watson, 2000). The dynamism involved in the models and theories of strategy, knowledge management in the organization, to understand the phenomenon as processes, it is the inevitable way to move forward in strategy research (Spender, 1996). According to Scherer & Dowling (1995), theory pluralism (Kuhn, 1970) is to create problems in the strategic management prescriptive domain. The findings of research i.e., theories and practices are developed to facilitate the firms in developing competitive advantage that can be sustained for a long period. The constructivist approach can cover it up

by way of a methodological approach (Mir & Watson, 2000). First, a phenomenon is viewed as a process that needs to be investigated and shaped rather than proven theory already existing. Second, the reality in social sciences is socially constructed (as discussed earlier “different from natural sciences”) therefore, the researcher is to investigate the phenomena and cannot be separated from it. Third, theory and practice are non-separable, at times theory support practice and at other, practices need to be investigated and provided with some new theory. Therefore the mixed-method approach is more suitable for these sorts of studies. Fourth, constructivism considers the entire context while having the investigations, while in realist only a few theoretical factors can be studied in one time having control mechanisms. Fifth, interpretation is considered an important part of the study. The process of investigation is thoroughly discussed and elaborated to reduce ambiguities. Finally, the constructivist follows the methodology approach as compared to the method approach of the realist. They can employ several methods rather than limiting to some specific statistical tools (Fligstien, 1991).

The constructivist approach is different from positivist and realist paradigms because it is theory-driven. It is believed that truth and reality are socially constructed. The theoretical position guides the researcher in problem construction, helps in identifying the theoretical procedures to be used, and the data sources (Boyd, 1991). Constructivists assume value bond subject, uncovering ambiguous objects having a good interaction with the situation to focus on details. Researchers are considered as crafting the situation through their discourse (Spivey, 1995). They become a part and component of the network creating knowledge (Law, 1992) and based on this entire guide the practice.

In the constructivist paradigm, rules are socially constructed, the manager is an actor, not a reactor. The environment is constructed by him by way of organizational routines, culture, communication, etc. At times the routines and rules are having variety and therefore lead to success (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). While the opposite can also be the result i.e., crisis of management (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984). In all such cases, there exist multiple realities, as organization actors are interacting to have a social exchange (Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996). The intelligent managers who can recognize this multiple reality in an organization can deploy the setup in such a manner so to bring in benefit to the organization (Burgelman, 1983). In the case of a diverse workforce, things are managed differently as compared to a regular workforce. The more critical the human resource involved in the task/project the more should the manager be able to apply multiple approaches and strategies to deal with.

Critical realism originates from the work of Bhaskar (1978), which gained popularity in social science due to its ability to lie on the continuum between realism and constructivism. It is different from the realism mainstream because it opposes the creation of social sciences laws in a closed system (Collier, 1994). A critical realist believes that the generalizability is subject to the replication of findings across the different sample. The strategic management theory like institutional, agency, resource dependence is not replicable everywhere, giving the same results. Critical realism is different from constructivism, as it believes in the replication of findings however the latter does not take the replication concept as a central point of argument (Tsang & Kwan, 1999, 2001; Mir & Watson, 2000). There are three basic founding principles of the critical realist paradigm. First, the reality of this world for which scientific

theories want to develop reality is structure and process and not just empirical figures. Second, these structures are the only contingent related to the empirical data. Third, knowledge about social reality can be attained through continuous and innovative mechanisms. Replication can be used for testing the theories (Tsang & Kwan, 1999).

Replication is desirable for the cases in which one empirical finding is tested in other settings to know and testify the theory. Ending up with theory from a single experiment has been carried out in organizational research. For example, the bobo doll experiment proposed social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), Mintzberg (1973), Pfeffer (1972) and Hofstede (1980) experiments. They used innovative ways and ended up giving widely applicable theories. However, the role of replication cannot be replaced (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). Therefore critical realism bridge this gap of the importance of context (constructivist) and facts and figures, empirical research (positivism), directing the scientist and researchers to move forward in an integrated manner rather than converging thought which is detrimental to theory development (Lederer, Kurz, & Lazarov, 2017).

Pragmatism as a paradigm is not a very new concept rather the use of mixed-method research has provided many linkages between the two and awareness among researchers (Howe, 1988; Pearce, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatism, beauty is that it works and focuses on the concept of "what works best for the particular research program under study" (Tashakkori, Teddlie, 1998). The extensive discussion on paradigms during the last decade has focused on constructivism and critical realism, thus negating the role of pragmatism at all (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). According to Denzin (2012), pragmatism focus on the meaning and consequences of the event/situation. The response to the event and its meaning cannot be given in advance. Therefore the concern of pragmatism is beyond methodology and mere problem-solving. Dewey has given the systematic approach for research based on the pragmatist paradigm having five steps identifying the problem, considering it different, giving a plan of action, evaluating that line of action, taking action (Morgan, 2014). It has distinguished the line between the post-positivist and constructivist. It is having a complete set of assumptions, therefore a replacement for the old paradigms. By using pragmatism as a research approach for strategic management, the questions will be directed more towards why and how to make a choice- plan of action for problem-solving.

THE WAY FORWARD- SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Braguinsky, & Hounshell, (2016) used the historical methodology i.e., hermeneutics to study the coevolution of firms and industry. Similarly, the trends of successful strategies, failure strategies by firms i.e., leading towards financial crunch and recession can be studied through hermeneutics. Using discourse analysis in strategy research is required when the issue has a concern with the relationship between language and the formulation and implementation of strategy i.e., strategy is considered as a system of shared meaning, the strategy is visible via text and talk, and strategy is the actual truth (Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008). This can be used to investigate questions like strategic change in some large organizations, in situations of successful mergers and acquisitions, etc. In such scenarios, the issue can be studied following the constructivist paradigm but if a pragmatic paradigm is used than the findings

would be more realistic because the objective and subjective both points would be considered by the researcher (Saunders et al. 2012). This new trend is encouraging for the researchers to think differently and not to stick to a single perspective compromising problem-solving. Though the papers using different methodologies, not the conventional ones are still primarily focusing on the positivist paradigm and methodologies, hope exists that the focus may shift towards problem-solving rather than following the same paradigmatic stance (Arora, Gittelman, Kaplan, Lynch, Mitchell, & Siggelkow, 2016).

THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM FOR STRATEGY RESEARCH

An integrative multi-paradigm approach is required for strategy research. Just following one paradigm is ineffective in terms of inculcating all the aspects of the phenomenon researched. Following a case study approach brings much insight and contextual integration (Combe & Botschen, 2004). Research paradigms should not be blindly applied to the strategy field. When the complexity increases, it is not possible for realism to curtail that and measure it as well. The management issues are highly interconnected, different paradigms have been introduced to deal with different sorts of complexities. Ansoff (1965) developed a rational paradigm. While dealing with large detail complexity, Shostack (1984) suggested having a functionalist paradigm. These developments offer solutions for quality management (strategy). Besides that, if a multi-paradigm approach is used it will incorporate and develop based on alternatives presented.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The structural changes in the global market that are resulting from the increased globalization, deregulation, competition, technological advancements, and obsolescence, changing customer demands are making things tough for the managers. Therefore, old techniques are no more applicable to cope with problems. To be competitive managers have not only to rely on Porter's model or just the Teece model of dynamic capabilities, new approaches are to be identified and used to meet the needs of the changing environment. Thus it must be recognized that the strategy field needs a new paradigm (Prahalad & Hamel, 1994). However, identifying that paradigm that can fit in and answer all the queries of the emerging field, making it a dominant paradigm, is need of the hour, though a tedious task as well. Pragmatism is the rise of a new paradigm after all others have been tested and criticized (Goles, Hirschheim, 2000). It offers more rigor and relevance in strategic management research. It recognizes the importance of theory in explaining the phenomenon and practicing the findings so to test and determine the value it can bring to the field. It enables the researcher of strategy to research any area they would like to explore like, strategic analysis based on cross-cultural aspects, political implications of privatization strategy, economic impact of mergers and acquisition, etc.. In order to refocus on the real world problems with logic, pragmatic scholarly work is required (Drnevich, Mahoney & Schendel, 2020). Pragmatic approach calls up interplay between the practice and research, thus, proposes a synergistic approach towards research that can bring in theoretical advancement in strategic management (Morgan, 2014).

Pragmatic research will bring in solutions to the practical problems faced by the managers at strategic levels, whether it's top, middle or operational level. It will be able to bring solutions that are applicable and bring in efficiency and effectiveness in the system. Use of pragmatism in strategic management research will also add to the body of theoretical knowledge along with practical contributions. Globalization has changed the trends, strategies and work practices of organizations. Pandemics like Covid 19 and similar disasters have opened up new opportunities for managers to be more practical and dynamic, if they want the survival of themselves and the organizations. Pragmatism gives this flexibility to look and investigate the practical problem in a scientific way. Thus researchers opting for pragmatism will be more practical and beneficial for the real world of strategic management.

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, the field of strategic management is going through extensive divergence and needs some integration to bring in some theoretical foundations besides the one existing. The existing dominant paradigm of realism and critical realism might not be able to answer all the problems correctly that are faced by the management of firms, who are the ultimate audience of strategy research i.e., practitioners. To give a realistic and broader applicable inference from the research, the focus must be shifted to other paradigms that can answer the unanswered or weakly answered questions. It can be the pragmatic, constructivist, functionalist, humanistic, radical structuralist paradigm, anyone which can be used.

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