

Multi-perspective Management Research: Fusion or Confusion?

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Management research is a very diffuse field. Some have argued that it needs to be able to clear the double hurdles of rigour and relevance. Some see management research as a 'design science' focusing on the development of technological rules while others would eschew any notion of the applicability of research findings to the practice of management. The variety of frameworks and stances available to underpin the conduct of management research make the selection of approaches potentially very difficult for experienced researchers and inexperienced researchers alike. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the issues affecting the conduct of a research project focusing specifically on the changing nature of managerial work from the perspective of a researcher who, until now, has adopted something of a positivistic stance: this researcher is now trying to develop a greater sense of reflexivity into his research. The paper first develops a framework in which management research can be located: it emphasises the different epistemological and ontological stances that can be taken. The paper then goes on to critique an approach based on an epistemological and ontological stance redolent of a positivistic approach this is oriented towards the product of a 'single truth' to discuss the possibility of conducting research using a framework that accepts the existence of multitudinous intangible, impressionistic, equally valid truths. The paper focuses on a programme of research into managerial work and the effect of organisational change on managerial work that has been in progress since the mid 1990s. The research so far has been highly empirical, has emphasised the collection and analysis of hard data and has led to the identification of a number of themes and issues. However, to reflect recent critiques of the epistemological and ontological basis of the field of work psychology, it was decided to develop a research strategy which would lead to the creation of narrative and text rather than numbers to explore if the issues raised in manager's accounts of their lived experienced bore any resemblance to the image developed from the analysis of data generated through questionnaires.

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