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EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTION OF POSTMODERNISM IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This paper highlights the main themes of postmodernism by identifying its unifying epistemological assumptions. It is essentially an exploration of how this approach has been put into practice in the field of management. The fragmentation and multiplicity of postmodernism offers alternative ways to conduct management research, as well this paper demonstrates that postmodernism is characterized by critical, strategic and rhetorical practices.

Keywords: postmodernism, management research, relativism.

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ЕПІСТЕМОЛОГІЧНА ОСНОВА ПОСТМОДЕРНІЗМУ В УПРАВЛІНСЬКИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯХ

У статті описано основи постмодернізму і виділено його головні епістемологічні передумови, досліджено, як цей підхід було введено у практику управління. Фрагментарність і множинність постмодернізму пропонують альтернативні способи проведення дослідження з питань управління. Також показано, що постмодернізм характеризується критичними, стратегічними і риторичними практиками.

Ключові слова: постмодернізм, управлінське дослідження, релятивізм.

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ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ ОСНОВА ПОСТМОДЕРНИЗМА В УПРАВЛЕНЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯХ

В статье описаны основы постмодернизма и выделены его главные эпистемологические предпосылки, исследовано, как этот подход был введен в практику управления. Фрагментарность и множественность постмодернизма предлагают альтернативные способы проведения исследования по вопросам управления. Показано, что постмодернизм характеризуется критическими, стратегическими и риторическими практиками.

Ключевые слова: постмодернизм, управленческое исследование, релятивизм.

Introduction. Postmodernism is an epistemology characterized by problematization of object truth and inherent suspicion toward metanarrative. It is notoriously difficult to define, because it would be contrary to the definition of post-modernist premise that there is no fixed meaning given to the idea of boundaries to truth or to absolute truth itself. Moreover, postmodernists use complex language to describe their position in their support of a multiplicity of perspectives.

The term "postmodernism" is a vague one because postmodernists claim that different problems are found in people having different beliefs and views. Initially, the concept of postmodernism refers to a trend that appears in a wide variety of disci-

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plines characterized by randomness, anarchy and fragmentation. According to Kellner (1988), Berg (1989) and Parker (1992), postmodernism has 2 facets. The first facet refers to the historical period we live in, and the second refers to the epistemological position.

It is not exactly clear when postmodernism began, but Charles Jencks (1984) suggests that the postmodern period began on 15 July 1972 marked by the knocking down of Le Corbusier's "machine of modern living". This period is characterized by dramatic changes in social and economic reality, where labels, such as "postindustrialism" (Bell, 1973); "the end of organized capitalism" (Lash and Urry, 1987); "the age of unreason" (Handy, 1989) have been developed to describe this era of tremendous changes.

There is a tendency for postmodernists to maintain a distance and skepticism from empirical research, as they flavor ambivalence and indeterminacy. Postmodernism rejects boundaries and emphasizes deconstruction (Parker, 1992; Best and Kellner, 1991). It is associated with difference, plurality, textuality and skepticism. Postmodernism writers such as Foucault (1980), Lyotard (1984), Giddens (1991) and Baudrillard (1983) assert that reality is subject to change and postmodernism is used in critical theory as a new and distinct mean to understand science.

Postmodernists believe realities are social constructs, and in the sense of postmodernism, realities are plural and relatives, and knowledge is the product of sociolinguistic construction. Empirical work in postmodernism is focused on gaining understanding rather than providing access to a universal truth. Postmodernists reject the notion that intersubjective communication implies a universal consensus. They encourage dissensus and intend to end all 'totalities by presenting a relativist 'totality'.

Postmodernism, grand narratives and the linguistic turn. Postmodernism is a movement away from modernism (Hassard, 1993), as it critiques the scientific mentality progress associated with the Enlightenment and challenges objectivity advocated by modernists. Postmodernists are skeptical towards metanarrative. They reject modernist metanarrative and positivist universalism (Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1984; Bauman, 1989).

Postmodernism argues that all knowledge is indeterminate. They challenge the positivist's objective truth and the possibility of a natural certain observational language with a "linguistic turn". The linguistic turn emphasizes the role of language, power relations and motivations (Lyotard, 1984; Gergen, 1992; Parker, 1992). It involves the belief that language is never innocent and realities are social-linguistic artifacts.

The linguistics sign is a 2-sided entity: signifier and signified (Saussure, 1996). Meaning is produced upon the relationship between signified and signifier. Saussure claims that the signified has primacy and speech has privilege over writing. Lacan (1977) and Derrida (1973) rejected Saussure's claim because of Saussure's logocentric tendencies.

Derrida (1973) argued that language implies circularity between premises and conclusion, and so any communication has multiple meanings. Vattimo (1992) and Rorty (1979) pointed out that knowledge emerges from a socio-linguistic process and reality is a changeable socio-linguistic artifact. Indeed, realities are plural and relative, and dependent on who the interested parties are and what their interest consist in (Lyotard, 1984, 1988).

Derrida (1973) challenged the empiricist method of the positivism by questioning its fundamental norms and premises, and tried to modify them. Derrida's approach is known as deconstruction. Deconstruction signifies certain reading and writing texts strategies, as it is about how the social-linguistic processes construct our comprehension of the world. For Derrida, written marks or signifiers do not arrange themselves within natural limits, but from chains of signification that radiate in all directions. He takes writing to be a sign for another sign (speech), whose significance is a fully representative meaning. As Derrida remarks, "there is nothing outside the text".

Postmodern analysis of management. In modern society we have experienced constant and rapid social and other changes in the political, economic, social, and educational areas as well as in many other significant fields. Thanks to science and civilization development, the need to rely on labor productivity has been replaced by more efficient machines and these have evolved into computerized production methods that have replaced many skilled operators with a less skilled but more productive machine operator. This has led to unprecedented material and technological developments that have brought greater prosperity to greater numbers within many societies.

But there are opposite forces that puts our society under the control of the industrial civilization that is gradually becoming more secular and alienated. Industrialization has led society to emphasize scientific efficiency, and the quantitative interpretation of figures, ignoring the people that provide the necessary services that are the foundation of these efficiencies and production. Thus, potentially critical thinking rational human beings are then slowly being eroded away, as these new values become rigid, utilitarian, and oversimplified. The original purposes of these new methods lay in the progress of material wealth to enhance the level and quality of our lives, but in fact this is not always the case, some universal human qualities are now more degraded than in the past, making the desirable human subject a blur with an accompanying loss of humanness. Postmodernism challenges these over-generalizations, similarities, absolutes, normatives, unities, and the sciences usually associated with modernism.

Postmodernism has influenced the way we judge the organization of knowledge in today's business world. In the postmodernism sense, who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided is crucial. Whether the knowledge is true or false is no longer important. As Jeffcutt (1993) and Gergen (1990) observe, organization of knowledge follows the paradigm of language games, and from this, there will be no standards worthy of universal respect dictating knowledge or truth.

Postmodernism challenges several aspects of a management's positivist orthodoxy. First, postmodernism rejects the notion of epistemic certainty. Second, postmodernism decentralizes the subject. Third, it emphasizes the role of language and power. Foucault proposed that subjectivation is a formative power of the self, surpassing the structures of knowledge and power from out of which it emerges. This is a power of thought, which Foucault (1980) says is the ability of human beings to problematize the condition under which they live.

Postmodernism and research methodology. Postmodernists conduct research differently compared to traditionalists. In the postmodern sense, the empirical approach

to social sciences is not possible. Postmodernists engage largely in drawing a sharp contrast between how confident a speaker is of their position and how confident they need to be to serve their end purpose. Some writers characterized this approach as parasitic since no new empirical works are being conducted (Alvesson, 1995). Not all postmodernists engage only in theory and philosophy, some like Joanne Martin (1990a) do empirical work as well. Nevertheless, postmodernists are always being criticized for taking a minimalist approach to empirical work (Yin, 1994; Feldman, 1998).

As Gergen and Thatchenkerry (1996) pointed out, there is nothing in postmodernism that argues against the use of empirical research. Postmodernist researchers like Kilduff and Mehra (1997) believe that all methods are equal and therefore various research styles can be combined to produce results. The focus of empirical research is on gaining an understanding of a situation rather than to produce a universal, generalizable theory. They recognize there will be many different understandings about reality and skeptical about all research methods.

While postmodernists emphasize a mix-and-match approach, others always associate postmodernism with the qualitative approach. Ethnography which focuses on the microaspects of organizational life is a favourite of postmodernists. Writer such as Linstead (1993b) and Wong (2003, 2004) identified a number of possible ethnography approaches: Postmodern and Rotian ethnography, Lyotardian ethnography, Baudrillardian ethnography and deconstructive ethnography. The aim of this postmodernism research is to uncover the social processes in the making of encompassing narratives consistent with Foucault's genealogical method. Researchers in postmodernism deconstruct the world as they perceive it as they recognize that reading is also a creative process. Thus, there will be numbers of possible understandings and interpretation of their works, as realities are plural and relatives in postmodernism perspective (Reed, 1997; Kilduss and Mehra, 1997; Boje, 1994; Rosenau, 1992; Giroux, 1992).

Postmodernism challenges positivist concepts of objectivity and subjectivity replace this concept with similar grounding in logic that ultimately refers to one another. Hence, truth is relative to one's mode of engagement with the world where there are no independently existing evaluative criteria. Moreover as Jeffcutt (1994), Wakefield (1990) and Gergen (1992) argued, postmodernism is based upon the relativistic metanarrative, and as Parker (1995) reported, this relativism created severe epistemic contradictions within postmodernism. Townley analyzed the social constitution of knowledge and order through the Foucaldian perspective and claimed that knowledge-power relations exist. Postmodernism sees knowledge as a multiple-narration story that depends upon who produces it. Habermas (1987) and Kellner (1988) claimed that Baudrillard (1983) and Lyotard (1984) commited a performative contradiction in their critique of positivism by employing a positivistic metanarrative. The paradox here is that postmodernists intend to end all totalities by presenting a relativist totality.

Conclusion. 2 equally problematic alternatives are presented in postmodernism. Firstly, relativism might create endless reflexive loops and we might become passive and introspective which is unappealing in management research. Secondly, fear of relativism might drive us to commit positivist unreflexive empiricism. As Giddens

(1991) commented, philosophical approaches should directly relate to social science, otherwise, it is pointless.

To sum up, postmodernism is characterized by difference, repetition and the diversity of meaning. It rejects the notions of presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty and the univocity of meaning. It is inherently relativistic and skeptical of positivist's universal generalizable statements and methodology. Some writers like Habermas who criticize postmodernists commit a performative contradiction in their critiques of positivism by employing the concepts and methods that only positivist reason can provide. The fragmentation and multiplicity of postmodernism offers an alternative way to conduct research in management.

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