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Reflections on conceptions of research methodology among management academics

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ABSTRACT

Taking as its premise that the role of academics as instructors is crucial in forming students' conceptions of research methodology, we consider differences in conceptions held by academics involved in its teaching and reflect on the associated implications. Drawing on web based questionnaire data, collected from a purposive sample of 190 predominantly European Management academics with an expressed interest in research methodology, we reveal differing conceptions about the nature of research and research methodology that are likely to be practically significant; differences between those with qualitative and quantitative expertise being the most salient. Finding fault with one methodology on the basis of the epistemological and ontological beliefs of the other does little to promote understanding or appreciation of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies. Rather, we argue, academics involved in management research methods and methodology teaching need to adopt a pluralist stance in which the legitimacy of different methodologies is both recognised and actively acknowledged.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this reflective piece is to consider differing conceptions of research methodology held by those academics involved in its teaching and reflect on the associated implications for the teaching of research methodology within Management. Over the past decade there have been a number of calls within the social sciences for the teaching of research methodologies and methods to be undertaken in an integrated manner (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) that removes the barriers between quantitative and qualitative traditions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005), originally highlighted in the paradigm wars of the 1980s (Denzin, 2010; Hammersley, 1992). Pedagogic review articles on teaching research methodologies and methods, although invariably broad in focus, have highlighted that students' perceptions of methodology are influenced by their instructors (Wagner, Garner, & Kawulich,

2011). Whilst the origin of these calls, including those cited earlier, has in some cases originated from those advocating the use of mixed methods research; they have, along with the pedagogic review articles, highlighted two inter-related aspects that are crucial to management research. These are, firstly the centrality of the research question (or problem) in determining the research design, and the need for that design to enable the question to be answered; and secondly a positive attitude to both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, alongside the (implicit) need for students to be able to utilize and appreciate both traditions.

Positivism and associated quantitative methodologies are recognised generally as dominant within the social sciences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Crotty, 1998). For the field of management, although Europe has been recognised as being strongly orientated to qualitative methodologies and alternative perspectives, the overall dominance of quantitative methodologies and its positivist North American core is argued to have strengthened since the turn of the millennium (Grey, 2010; Üsdiken, 2010). At the same time, the importance of academics as instructors in breaking down barriers between quantitative and qualitative methodologies has been emphasised, highlighting their responsibility to prepare students who appreciate and recognise the utility of both (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Leech,

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