

Breaking the Mould in Research¹

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Management research is about three decades old in India. In terms of history and the institutional avenues for high quality research, the Indian management research is amongst the pioneers outside of United States and is comparable to Europe. It is therefore appropriate to take stock and ask the pertinent question -- what has been the contribution, and the reasons thereof, of management research done in India.

Management research is typically judged by its contribution to the two constituencies it addresses i.e. the advancement of management theory and the improvements in management practice in organisations. At an aggregate level, contribution of Indian research to the advancement of management theory is not significant. The number of publications in world's top academic journals have been very few, the citations of Indian work by other researchers have been negligible, and Indian research has yet to pioneer a school of thought or research in the mainstream management theory. While there have been lot of inputs to the management practice through teaching and training, the research based contributions to practice have not been many. Barring exceptions in areas like HRD and leadership to an extent, Indian research has not been able to generate 'thought leaders', who could have dramatically influenced the evolution of Indian organisations and mobilised the managers.

The ineffectiveness of management research in India, is a source of concern. Though a variety of explanations can be put forward, the three reasons which stand out are :

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- **Difficulty in getting international publications** Unlike the disciplines of science and technology, management research is based on the issues and responses of organisations. As the research findings and conceptualisations are made from the real-life experiences of practitioners, the management research tend to follow practice. The issues faced by American organisations have dominated management research, given the importance of America in world economy and it being the founding place for management as a discipline of formal study. Recognition of research on Japanese organisations in top journals of the discipline, was concomitant with the increasing importance of Japanese companies from the 1970s. As the Indian companies were of little consequence in the world economy and the issues faced by Indian managers were very different, it was difficult to relate with and get top journals interested in the Indian research. With the inability of Indian researchers to establish their own journals of international quality and standing, the research dropped into a mindset of being outside the mainstream and being 'second fiddle'.
- **Undemanding Indian management environment** Till the onset of economic reforms in 1991, the Indian business environment was highly protective, stable and predictable. The pressure on Indian organisations and managers to innovate was largely missing, and companies rarely went through fundamental business and organisational reorientations. As Indian organisations were generally not struggling with challenging and 'life and death' situations, there had little need for well-researched new management ideas and processes. A demanding business environment which could have provided the impetus to Indian research, was broadly missing till 1991. When businesses needed to respond to the challenges of liberalisation and globalisation, the Indian research found itself wholly inadequate. And organisations and managers needed to access overseas thinkers and management consulting firms, who lacked understanding of Indian issues and who often displayed unwillingness or incapability to adapt to local requirements.
- **Lack of research thrust in academic institutions** Though the first two reasons could have lead to lessening of emphasis on research, the Indian academic institutions failed to make research as it's basic activity. While the Indian technology institutions emphasised publications and supervision of research work in the faculty evaluations, leading to the creation of 'competitive' research environment; the management institutions failed to do so. They instead emphasised teaching and training, which in the absence of strong research, promotes a culture of dependence on someone else's ideas and inhibits original thinking.

On putting it all together, Indian management research finds itself casted into a 'follower - inward looking' mould or mindset. However the tide could turn in it's favour, as the first two reasons would slowly become favourable and the third is within control of Indian management institutions.

Move from controlled to market economy have brought some coherence between mainstream and Indian management research issues, with the convergence in the governing management research premise of competition. As India and China are expected to be the next growth engines of world, the management issues and innovations in these countries would be of significant importance in future. The research on these emerging markets, as the Japanese before, would be considered a critical and welcome addition to the mainstream management theory. This should obviate the constraints on getting international publications, facilitating quality and path breaking research. On the other hand, Indian organisations and managers would need rigorously tested and researched approaches inputs for responding to fast changes and achieving competitiveness. As in case of Japanese companies, it is quite possible that Indian companies may develop a new way of management, which is rooted in it's socio-economic conditions and aspirations of Indian managers.

Therefore Indian management research needs to break out of the mould or mindset. It should capitalise on the opportunity, to contribute to the advancement of management theory and to help in Indian organisation's quest for global competitiveness. The research being more of an individualised process, the researcher's would need to adopt a mindset more tuned either to the path breaking research at the world level or to the issues of Indian managers. The management institutes would need to develop mechanisms for making research an integral component of faculty evaluation and growth, and the institutes may choose few focus areas to do substantive work. Some institutional and association thrust would be required to create some journals of world standing, in a decade or so. The journals may cover issues related to emerging markets, rather than India alone, for better coverage and richness.