

NEW PARADIGMS IN BUSINESS RESEARCH

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This paper examined the nature of research business management, the problems in defining research in business, the clues form existing theory of research, and proposed a framework for defining research in business. The nature of research in business covers a wide scope, and is interrelated to sociology, psychology, political science, mathematics, economics and other sciences. The problems in defining research in business relates to basic versus applied research, the field of study, the place to study, the method, theories and concepts, and the levels of research quantitative versus qualitative research. From the existing theory of research, the author proposed that research in business may be redefined on the basis of three dimensions: the field of study, the methodology, and the theories and concepts. Eight typologies of research are advanced: case study, pure research, transfer, instrumental research, theoretical research, theoretical transfer research, instrumental transfer research, and theoretical instrumental research. Implications of the proposed model are presented.

What is research in business? This question has often been asked, yet the answers provided have never been more than satisfactory. Consultancy reports, case studies and review of articles, could these be considered research? These questions have provoked the academics to define research and set standard criteria on what is research and what is not research. The performance of academics and research personnel are evaluated based on their research work. To the researchers, they are scuffled in meeting the demands which are often contradictory, as on what to do in research – to be known by their colleagues or to be recognised by professionals elsewhere.

In Malaysia, research in management or business is a recent phenomenon. The rapid growth of training institutions and business organisations have set forth the development of management education in this country. Professional managers now desire to seek new information and solutions to current problems in business.

This paper proposed a framework in defining research in business management. Specifically, this paper will examine the nature of research in business management, the problems in defining research in business management, the clues from existing theory of research, and redefining research in business management.

RESEARCH IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Research is a systematic and organised effort to investigate a specific problem that needs a solution. It is a series of steps designed and followed, with the goal of finding answers to the issues that are of concern to us in the work environment. In business management, research is built upon the foundation of scientific inquiry in contrast to informal or common sense knowledge, the latter being anecdotal and unsystematic.

Therefore, it is the purpose of all research to discover answers to questions raised by scientists and decision makers. To the business scientists, their concerns are directed to the application of theory to problems of the organisation. Their tasks appear to be one of setting priorities for solving problems through research or intuition. This implies that research in business management generally focuses on applied research as opposed to pure research or basic research in other scientific fields. The primary concern towards applied research is attributable to the fact that research in business is problem oriented, and it does not appear that business organisations would appreciate pure research *per se*, as it does not appear that such research could contribute directly to the business organisation. This statement is refutable as there are positive indications that basic research has contributed much to the growth and development of large and small concerns in the west. However, this statement has yet to be proven in Malaysia.

Basic research seeks essentially an extension of knowledge. It is not necessarily problem oriented. It is conducted for the purpose of extending the frontiers of knowledge, and may have no know immediate application, which is normally carried out by public institutions or government.

In business management, the area of research covers a wide scope and draws upon findings of related disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, political science, mathematics, and other sciences. According to Murdick and Cooper (1982), business research is concerned with the broad topic of the theory of the operation of business firms (and the people who comprise them) in their environment. This includes the study of human and organisational behavior and their reactions with the firms. It also includes broad topics such as consumer behaviour, strategic behaviour, social, political and economic influences, social policy issues, business ethics or economics of business firms. Alternatively, business research may take the usual functional organisation of companies and focus on theory or on specific operational problems. In the former case, the purpose of the research is to develop precepts or principles, whilst in the latter, the objective is to provide solutions to current problems.

Research in management, specifically, consists of studying the structure of management with a view towards improvement. For instance, the study of the job of general managers or the study of the social responsibility and objectives of the business firms. Accounting research consists primarily of historical research into

the records of transactions for business firms, which may include budgets. Specific areas of research in accounting may be a study of the social accounting system in the public sector, or a study on the impact of the information system in accounting. In the area of finance, many researchers in different disciplines have been involved in the recent years. Generally, one would expect financial research like a study on the cost of corporate debts, a study on the efficiency of stock markets, and studies on risks and insurance management. In marketing, it covers a wide range of topics such as advertising, product policy, marketing research and consumer behaviour. In the area of production management, the focus has been on material and equipment rather than on human aspects. Specific areas in production include a study of an inventory model with full load ordering, a mathematical programming model for the allocation of natural gas, and learning curves, production rate and programme costs. In organisational behaviour, research in this area has been influenced by theories in psychology and sociology. Major topics may include leadership behaviour, job characteristics and design, and wage and salary administration. Specific topics include a study on employee absenteeism in Company ABC, power and influence in not-for-profit organisations, and a study on the job satisfaction and job motivation among university lecturers.

These are some of the major and minor areas of research in business management. In the areas of marketing and organisation/ human behaviour, much research is influenced by psychological and sociological theories. In general management, the influence of these disciplines are also inevitable. They are more, qualitative than quantitative in their nature. However, some researchers in marketing have advanced mathematical models in their research, particularly in the area of purchasing. In finance and production, it has always been dominated by quantitative sciences, leaving a negligible proportion in less quantitative research. Nonetheless there appears an equilibrium in the approach towards research in business to the extent that objectivity and subjectivity of research are the prime movers in progressing knowledge.

PROBLEMS IN DEFINING RESEARCH IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

As mentioned earlier, research in business covers a wide range in scope and depth. The topics are interdisciplinarily related. As a result, researchers have found it difficult to define research in business. Specifically, one issue that is often raised relates to basic and applied research. Business managers generally loathe basic research. Academics are committed to basic research. These differences cost heavy penalties to the pursuit of knowledge. Academics are not able to fulfil the needs of educational institutions, and business managers do not perceive the advantages to be acquired from their search for knowledge.

Another issue in defining business research relates to the field of study. What field of study to choose? Where to study? In search for the field of study, researchers must not only define the area such as marketing, finance or accounting,

but identify the precise areas such as portfolio theory, product policy, advertising effectiveness and diversification strategy. In other words, this requires a FOCUS towards real and current issues in those areas. For instance, in finance, one might start with a general portfolio theory, then progresses into the optimal theory and finally into the efficient portfolio theory. Focusing involves segmenting the general theory into groups, not to differentiate from the general theory but to achieve a clear differentiation from various portfolio theories. This means identifying the research towards a specific topic in a specialised area, like a study on the Mao's model of portfolio theory, or Sharpe's model. Only by focusing on the area of study will the purpose of research be achieved; extending the precedent theories or rejecting previous propositions. Alternatively, a new theory could be developed from the study. The purpose, therefore, is to redefine the central or roots of the issue in a specialised area.

Unless this is advocated, knowledge will remain idle but it will never reach the level of saturation. If it does, then progress is doomed. On the contrary, knowledge can be given a new phase in its life like the technological trends.

Focusing the area of research also requires identifying the venue (place) of study. Where to study is crucial in defining business research. A business research topic could be obsolete in the west but never in the developing countries. Differences in geographical and cultural context may result to differences in findings, thereby extending the antecedent conclusions or advocating new concepts. Conducting research in different context will add the generalisability of a research model or theory. Where to study would also imply focusing the demographic characteristics: sex groups, ethnic groups, and income categories.

What methods to choose in the study has also posed several problems to researchers. New methods must be developed and adopted by quantitative and qualitative geniuses. These have to be identified and focussed. For example, to study managerial jobs, there may be 14 different methods which could be adopted. Which one to choose, how to choose and the basis for selecting a method must be clear. Perhaps, it is useful to use timing beeps in studying the nature of managerial jobs, or use dynamic programming in analysing human behavioral patterns. Methods in research must be FOCUSED and DIFFERENTIATED. Combined methods are encouraged to ensure consistent results, such as observation, interview, and diary method.

Researchers in business are often confronted with the problem of defining theories and concepts. What theories or concepts to use? How construct theories? How to refine theories? And how to serve theories and concepts? Refining theories are important. They must be reconstructed, and there must be selectivity in choosing concepts and theories. It is important for a researcher to know how to use the appropriate concept related to a particular theory. Finally, it is important to diversify in the reconstruction of theories and concepts. Ambiguity in this area has hindered the development and progress of scientific knowledge in certain areas

in business management. As such, this problem must be reviewed with greater interest than usual.

Finally, one common controversial issue in defining research in business relates to the levels of research. Research may be done by focussing at **QUANTITATIVE** approach or **QUALITATIVE** approach. Quantitative approach was developed by Comte (1896) and Durkheim (1938) and focuses on facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individual. This approach in business management, uses questionnaire, inventories and demographic analyses which produce numbers and can be analysed statistically to reject relationships between operationally defined variables. In quantitative research, the focus has been on issues like what are the causes of the social phenomenon, the forms it assumes, and the variations it displays? It also focuses on what are the consequences of the phenomenon, the forms it assumes, and the variations it displays.

An excellent example of a quantitative approach is the PIMS (Profit Impact on Market Strategy) study and the Hatten study on the beer industry in United States.

Qualitative approach differs in a number of ways. It takes a phenomenologist reference and is concerned with understanding humans behaviour from the actors' frame of reference (Weber, 1968). It yields descriptive data which enable the researcher to see the situations as the actors see that. The qualitative ask questions like what's going on here? What are the forms of phenomenon? And what are the variations in this phenomenon? (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Lofland, 1971).

It is important to note that one research strategy is not necessarily more appropriate than the other, or choosing a qualitative or quantitative approach. Instead, we believe that the best strategy in research is to use both approaches. A researcher might be interested in both discovering the nature and characteristics of the phenomena associated in the study, and at the same time ascertaining the causes and relationships between the other phenomena associated in the study.

The three levels of research can be classified based on two axioms: the level of quantitative research and the level of qualitative research. Figure 1 shows the various levels of research in business management.

Figure 1: Levels of Research in Business

		Level of Quantitative Research	
		low	high
Level of Qualitative Research	high	"MASTERS"	"DOCTORATE"
	low	"BACHELOR"	"MASTERS"

From the matrix table, the level of quantitative and qualitative research is least rigorous at the "Bachelor" level. The "Masters" group could refer to either high quantitative and low qualitative level, or low quantitative and high qualitative level of research. At the "Doctorate" level, the requirements for quantitative and qualitative nature of research is high.

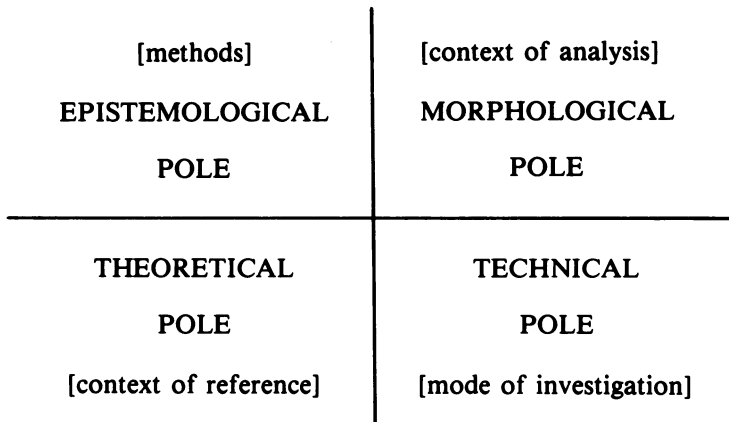
This matrix also shows the possible difficulties encountered by researchers in defining business research. At what level should researchers operate and concentrate in their work endeavour? Those with quantitative orientations such as the Chicago Business School, has set high priorities for such kind of research projects. The traditional English universities emphasise much on qualitative kind of research, except for a few, influenced by the atlantic wave. As often, in ordinary business research, a trade-off is inevitable between the two axioms. This has to be a personal decision based on one's values and judgement as it oftens involve the self-imposition of one's belief and attitude in conducting research.

The matrix may be considered as a step towards indentifying the kind of research in management. The next step would be to identify the main issues leading to the formulation and implementation of research.

Clues from existing theory on research

According to Bruyne, Herman and Schoutheete (1974, p 36), there are four methodological poles in the field of practical scientific research. They are the EPISTEMOLOGICAL pole, the MORPHOLOGICAL pole, the THEORETICAL pole and the TECHNICAL pole. Figure 2 shows the four poles of scientific research.

Figure 2: Poles of Scientific Research



These aspects are not considered separately but they related to particular aspects of the same reality in scientific research. The four poles define the methodological field which assures the scientificness of practical research. The epistemological pole performs an important function, which gurantees the objectivity of research. The hypothetico-deductive method is an example of this pole. The theoretical pole guides the elaboration of the hypotheses and the construction of concepts. It refers to the context such as the positivism, the structuralism, the functionalism and comprehensiveness. The morphological pole will determine the rules of the game: the structure of research, the formation of the scientific objects, which self-imposes a certain pattern, and a certain order (or preferences) in the elements. In this context, typologies or systems or structural models are developed. The technical pole controls the collection of data. It requires precision in establishing it but does not guarantee its exactness. The interaction of these poles provide a practical methodology of research. This conception introduces a typological model but not a chronological one of research.

This view of scientific research theory is comprehensive and generally accepted in research methodology. However, Popper (1980, p 59) considers scientific theories as universal statements. Specifically, he considers theories as: "..... nets cast to catch what we call 'the world': to rationalise, to explain, and to master it. We endeavour to make the mesh even finer and finer." Trusted (1979) believed that if a theory is to be ranked as scientific, it must be possible to related the theoretical entities to observation, so that its existence can be inferred. And to infer the existence of theoretical entities from observation, one must be able to take the propositions of the theory, which describe those entities, and logically derive other propositions which will correspond to empirical generalisations. Thus, the outstanding characteristics of any scientific theory is that firstly, the theory explains observed regularities by relating to new entities which educes as existent facts, secondly, it must be possible to deduce generalisations from the propositions of the theory which can be used to predict observable events.

NEW PARADIGMS IN REDEFINING BUSINESS RESEARCH

The basic issues in business research are identifying the nature of research to be done in the field, the kind of research are we in, the field that we want to do, what do we want to study? where do we want to study? and above all, why do we want to do research in that field? This suggests that one of the major axis in the process fo conducting business research is identifying the FIELD OF STUDY.

As a researcher, it is appropriate, then, to question on how to do this study? What method(s) to adopt? Why is (are) the method(s) adopted? Are there better ways to conduct the research? This process involves identifying the METHODOLOGICAL design.

The final dimension involves identifying the CONCEPTS and THEORIES.

What concepts and theories to adopt and use, will depends on the major objective of the study. Researchers would need to define and refine their concepts towards constructing a concrete model. How to serve these concepts and theories must be considered as they may not be practical but logical. The level of abstraction must be restrained to the extent that it fits the appropriate research methodology.

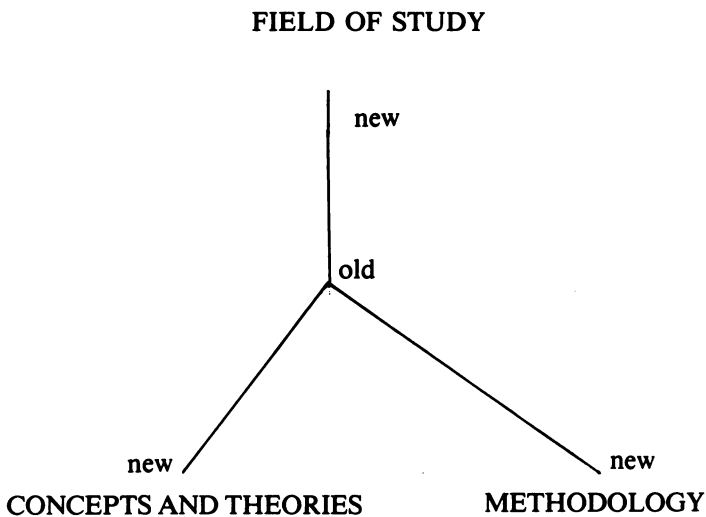
Following these, together with clues from existing theory of research, it is proposed that business research may be redefined on the basis of the three axioms: **FIELD OF STUDY**, **METHODOLOGY**, and **CONCEPTS and THEORIES**. See Figure 3.

From the triangular construct, there are eight typologies of research in business: case study, pure research, transfer research, instrumental research, theoretical research, theoretical transfer research, instrumental transfer research, and theoretical instrumental research.

Case study

Case study is based on old methodology, field of study and concepts or theories. It is scientific as it is based upon a systematic process in investigating problems and providing solution(s). Some have argued that a case study is not a **RESEARCH** work as it is based on common sense or common knowledge. This is not exactly true as hard analysis of the case leads to conclusions which may be contrary to common sense but later appear to be quite natural. As such, so long as the case fits into our model, a case study is scientific research work!

Figure 3: Paradigms for Redefining Business Research



Pure research

This kind of research pursue new discoveries – new field of study, methodology and concepts and theories. It may be termed as innovative research as it is designed to enrich the philosophy of scientific knowledge. It is in this area of research that knowledge expands and extends beyond the frontier of its boundaries. It is the sign of progress and development. One criticism of this type of research is that it may appear too abstract – leading to its immediate utility as impossible. It is often "unacceptable" temporarily among academia but strives to exist continuously longer than other kinds of research. Pure research is rare and limited, but it is the gem of "l'excellence d'academia."

Transfer research

Transfer research refers to the application of an old methodology, concepts and theories into a new field of study. It is in this type of research where one concurs or refutes generalisations of precedent theories on a certain issue (or subject). In this type of research, the place of the study is new. Most research on comparative management fits into this category of research.

Instrumental research

An instrumental research uses new methodology in an old field of study and concepts and theories. For instance, in the study of managerial work, various methods have been developed and used such as the diary (Carlson, 1954), unstructured observation (Dalton, 1954), structured observation (Mintzberg, 1973), and Questionnaire (Hemphill, 1959). The purpose is to examine an old issued and the existing theory but in search for new discovery through new methods. Findings in this kind of research usually complements the previous results, thus, completing and expanding existing concepts and theories, Instrumental research could, on the contrary, lead to different results and jeopardise the existing theory in that domain. One particular example is the study on managerial work by Synder and Glueck (1980) and that by Minzberg (1973). For the latter, managers do not plan, while the former shows how managers plan.

Theoretical research

Theoretical research aims at developing new theories and concepts based on existing field of study by using an old method. This would lead to what is a "good" or "not so good" theory. A good theory is one that expands with knowledge and it holds in whatever method of study.

Theoretical research is geared towards improving the development of knowledge in a domain and enhance the level of connaissance. However, theoretical research is rare as they are generally ventured by well experienced academia in a particular field. Else, theoretical research is left by academia who disbelieve in

abstracts. It demands a high level of creativity, and imagination on the part of the researcher, such as a visionary, where one can foresee the future of a particular domain if it is not to remain where it is.

Theoretical transfer research

When one uses an old method but indulges into a new field of study and concepts and theories, it is known as theoretical transfer research. It is geared towards developing new ideas and issues which have an important contribution in a certain area of study. Marshall and Stewart (1981) in studying the perceptions of managers job choices has developed new theoretical concepts in the field of managerial work behavior by using the interview and questionnaire methods.

Theoretical transfer research aims at finding new approaches so as to enrich the connaissance of researchers. It purports to extend the frontiers of knowledge. The contribution of this kind of research is of two folds: one in developing new concepts and theories so as the level of knowledge in that domain progresses, and secondly, to study the validity and generalisability of these theories and concepts in a new context.

Instrumental transfer research

When an old concept and theory is used with a new methodology in a new field of study, it is said to be an instrumental transfer research. The new subject examined may be limited only to a certain country, region, subject matter, issue or questions. The new methods may be other than the "normal" methods used in the study.

Instrumental transfer research aims at testing existing theories and concepts in a new environment or context, using new methods. The conclusions from this type of research could ultimately lead to the development of a new theory, and finally, gain some theoretical insights. Instrumental transfer research is important in so far as the level of generalisability and validity of precedent theories have to be expanded and extended if scientific knowledge is to progress.

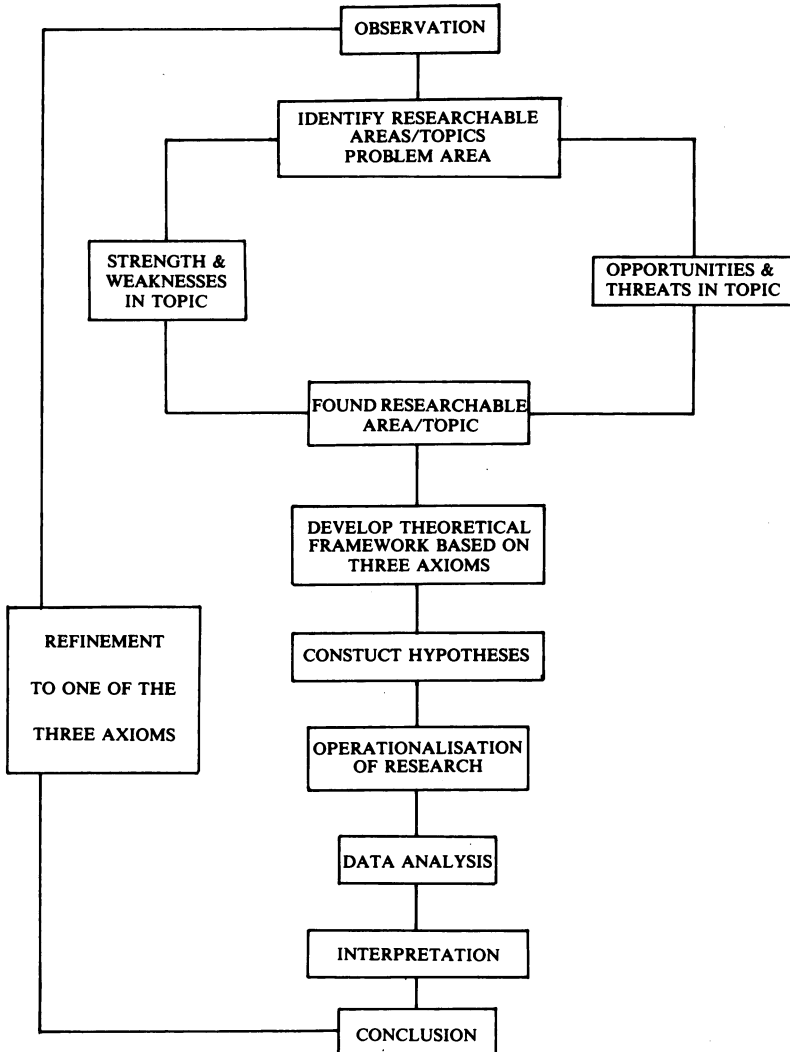
Theoretical instrumental research

Theoretical instrumental research is aimed at using new concepts and theories, and methodology, but on an existing field of study. This type of research will contribute in the field of connaissance and complements the previous findings, and make further progress in the conceptual development of a particular subject. For example, Stewart (1982) on managerial work choices used the Myer-Briggs test in her study. This kind of research will lead to further needs of research in a particular field of study – thus leading to the demands for other types of research.

CONCLUSION

One implication of this paper is that it is, and will be necessary to formulate strategies in conducting research. It is important to emphasize the formalisation process of conducting research, from the area of determining a researchable topic up to the end result of the study. Figure 4 shows the process of formulating a research strategy.

Figure 4: Process of Formulating Research Strategy



Further, it should be noted that the beginning process of a research could either be focused at a CASE STUDY, and later reaching to the PURE RESEARCH. This means that a researcher may begin the study by using old methods, field of study and concepts and theories, which will then lead to possibly the process to THEORETICAL RESEARCH, TRANSFER RESEARCH or INSTRUMENTAL RESEARCH. Other researchers could then follow-up with the theoretical-transfer, tranfer-instrumental, and theoreticalinstrumental type of research.

Another implication of this paper is that academics and students in business management may be able to appreciate what research is all about. The important contribution of research may be depend upon the theoretical contribution and practical utility of the study. When it has a high level of theoretical and practical utility, it may be considered as a “NOVEL”. This is most desirable in universities and research institutions and other business organisations. It is only when this level has been attained that universal knowledge is appreciated. Figure 5 shows the research contribution portfolio matrix.

Figure 5: Research Contribution Portfolio Matrix

		Practical Utility of Research	
		low	high
Theoretical Contribution of Research	high	“SCIENCE NON FICTION”	“NOVEL”
	low	“ROMANCE SERIES”	“SCIENCE FICTION”

When the research conducted has little practical importance, but high theoretical importance, it is a “SCIENCE NON-FICTION”. This type of research emphasises more on practical importance but little on its theoretical contribution. The most undesirable kind of research is the “ROMANCE SERIES.”

For a successful researcher, one must be either in a “Science Fiction” category and then go on to the “Science Non-Fiction” and finally to the “Novel” portfolio. As a corollary, the researcher must move from the “Bachelor” level to the “Masters”. and then to the “Doctorate” level. At the “Masters” level, one could choose either an “MBA” approach, which is more practical oriented, or an “M.Sc” approach, which is more theoretically oriented.

In conclusion, this paper has important implications in starting a research project in business management. If it is to serve the practical aspects of the business world, business managers must know the fundamental process of conducting

research in business, and only then would business managers be able to appreciate what research is for. In developing countries, like Malaysia, the practical value of research is often undervalued, as the level of starting a research in business has yet to be developed. Until academia begins to indulge into more research in business, and until the business sector is willing to cooperate and indicate their appreciation in research, the starting point of research in business management will never see light at the end of the tunnel.

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