

The Role of Geography in Management: A Timely Matter of Concern in Education and Knowledge Management in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

According to Hartshorne (1939) geography is the science that provides accurate, orderly and rational description of the variable character of the earth surface. This definition emphasizes that everything on this earth has a geographic dimension as everything is place specific and changing from place to place. Thus, management is also a geographic phenomenon, as managerial methods, practices and decisions also change from place to place. They are time and place specific and acting as processes changing over time and space which are emphasized as identities in geography.

At present, geographical concepts are significantly applied in management. Particularly in environmental, real estate, human resource and marketing management its application is salient. Internationally, geography is taught as a subject in different faculties of commerce and management. In UK and USA universities even degrees on geography and management are offered.

Unfortunately the management faculties in Sri Lanka have neglected its importance particularly in the recent past. Nearly two decades ago economic and commercial geography was taught as a subject of the commerce degree programme but that has also been excluded after the revision of curricular. However, geographical concepts are still significantly applied in management but it seems that academics and practitioners in the field of education and knowledge management are not well aware of geography behind management. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to emphasize the importance of the role of geography for creative and innovative business management practices in Sri Lanka.

Methodologically this is a conceptual and thought raising paper by emphasizing the significance of various concepts in geography to the field of management. This is done through a literature survey by following purposive sampling technique for the selection of literature. To emphasize its significance many theoretical and practical aspects particularly accepted internationally are cited. As the outcome, it is expected that the expertise in the field of education and knowledge management will understand the importance of this subject for creative business management practices in Sri Lanka as the paper emphasizes its importance through the geographical identity and the concepts applied in management, decision making in management, world practices in different universities and the text books published in the field of geography and management.

Keywords: Education and knowledge management, Geography, Place specific, Process, Time.

INTRODUCTION

Geography can simply be defined as the science that studies spatial arrangement of various physical and human phenomena on the earth surface. Even though geography has been defined by many still Hartshorne's definition has a significant validity as it clearly outlines its scope and identity. As defined by Hartshorne (1939) geography provides accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface. Accordingly, any kind of matter can be considered as a variable character as everything on this earth changes from place to place.

Initially geographers ask two main questions: where is something? and why is it there? In answering to the first question geographers attempt to analyze spatial pattern and behaviour of various physical and human phenomena. As the answers to the second question, they attempt to find the causes which have led to create that kind of spatial pattern and behaviour. Spatial pattern or the behaviour of something is not a product which was generated at once on the earth. It is some kind of process passing through different time phases associated with generation, degeneration, rejuvenation and regeneration. Therefore, the concepts of space, time, pattern and process occupy a significant place in geography. That is why Wassmansdorf (1995) has emphasized that geography studies pattern and processes of human and environmental landscapes that comprise real and perceived space. It means that not only the objective space but also the subjective space is taken into consideration by geographers.

According to the above illustration geography mainly focuses on space, pattern and processes associated with time of any kind of variable character on the earth surface. Its focus on these themes is based on the following two main approaches.

- Regional approach – which emphasizes the region firstly and attempts to analyze and understand all geographical/variable characters on the earth surface in a spatial perspective.
- Systematic/Thematic approach – which emphasizes firstly the theme as the variable character and analyzes and explains the spatial behaviour of that particular theme. Accordingly, geography of management belongs to the thematic approach in geography as the theme or the subject of management can also be studied by this approach so that spatial pattern and processes of management could spatially be analyzed and explained well.

At present, geographical concepts are significantly applied in management and particularly in marketing, human resource, environmental, real estate, and tourism management its application is salient. Internationally, geography is taught as a subject in different faculties of commerce and management. In the universities in UK, USA and Canada even degrees on geography and management are offered. Unfortunately the management faculties in Sri Lanka have neglected its importance particularly in the recent past. Nearly two decades ago economic and commercial geography was taught as a subject of the commerce degree programme of the Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies but that has also been excluded after the revision of syllabuses. However, geographical concepts are still significantly applied in management but it seems that academics and practitioners in the field of education and knowledge management are not well aware of the importance of geography behind management.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

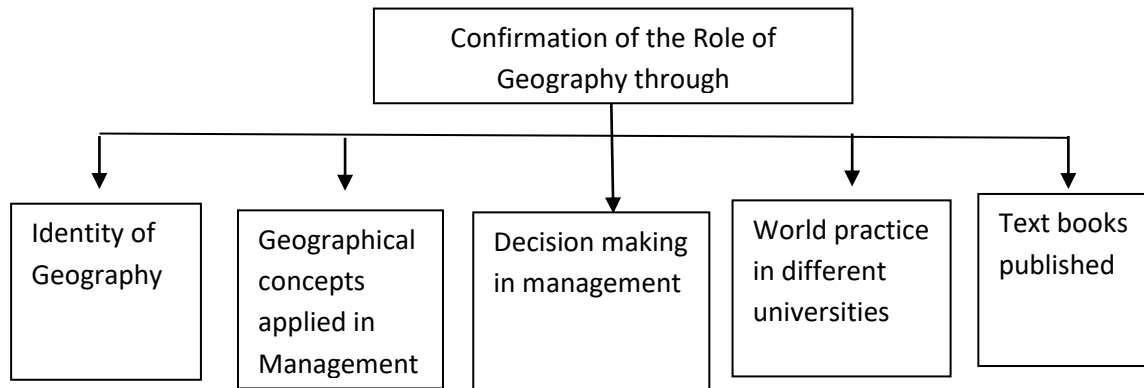
According to the illustration of introductory part, the objective of this paper is to emphasize the importance of the role of geography for creative and innovative business management practices so that the expertise in the field of education and knowledge management can rethink of its significance when restructuring their curricula.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically this is a conceptual and thought raising paper by emphasizing the significance of various concepts in geography to the field of management. This is done through literature survey by citing many examples accepted and applied internationally. Accordingly, the methodological design of the paper is as follows.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

In justifying the relevance of geography to the field of management the following conceptual frame was developed.



Sampling from literature

Population of the literature available from this field is infinite. There are lot of web sources, books, journal articles and other sources published in this field. Therefore, the purposive sampling technique was followed in this paper by selecting the most relevant and available sources according to the judgment of the author to justify the validity of geography to management education. According to the objectives and the matters highlighted in the conceptual design literature was purposively selected to justify the arguments of the paper.

Sources of data and information

As the main source of data collection web sources were significantly used particularly in justifying the world practice and the text books published in this field. In addition, for the justification of identity, concepts and decision making in management, books and journal articles were used.

Analysis of data and information

Gathered information were initially analyzed according to the conceptual design developed by the researcher. Literature were sorted according to the sub themes constructed under the main conceptual framework to justify the validity of the theme. By analyzing the concepts with supportive evidence from literature the validity of geography to the field of management was justified with logical arguments to conclude.

CONFIRMATION THROUGH THE IDENTITY OF GEOGRAPHY

Geography of management

Before the discussion of geography of management it is important to understand what is management? Taylor (cited in George, 2009) who is known as the father of scientific

management defines management as the art of knowing what you want to do and then seeing that is done the best and cheapest way. According to Fayol (cited in George, 2009) management is to forecast, to plan, to organize, to command, to co-ordinate and to control. As emphasized by Drucker (cited in George, 2009) management is work and as such it has its own skills, its own tools and its own techniques.

The art of knowing what you want to do as emphasized by Taylor has a geographical identity as the art of knowing should significantly vary according to different geographical spaces. It means that the art of knowing to do something is determined by geographical factors in different environment as the universalism of management practices cannot be applied to all spaces. Accordingly, as emphasized in the definition of Fayol forecasting, planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling should also be determined by geographical environment in different spaces. Drucker has used three concepts such as own skills, own tools and own techniques in defining management which significantly emphasize geographical dimensions as the own means skills, tools and equipment suitable to our own geographical space that should be determined by geographical factors of that particular environment.

Any kind of variable/concept has its geography, as everything changes from place to place. Accordingly management also has a geography as the spatial pattern and processes of management change from place to place with the time. How management deals with the subject of geography can basically be emphasized in terms of the following geographical identities and approaches.

Managerial space and its spatial pattern

This emphasizes management as a spatial phenomenon as different managerial spaces can be identified and demarcated in the world at macro or micro level. For example, when it refers to the public management some regions and countries in the world still apply top-down management approach in finding solutions to the problems while some other regions and countries use bottom-up approach. It is interesting to find out what causes are leading to such spatial pattern or spatial demarcation of management. Green management initiatives are another examples significantly addressed in environmental and human resources management at present making a clear spatial demarcation mainly in industrialized countries compared to other regions and countries in the world. It is a policy imperative in management to

understand the geography behind such managerial strategies and initiatives in providing productive solutions to the problems in management. Such strategies and initiatives not only construct separate geography but also they are mainly lead by geographical phenomena such as global warming, climate changes, ozone layer depletion and the problem of greenhouse gases at micro and macro level in different spaces in the world.

Management as a spatial process

A process is a series of actions which are carried out or naturally happening in order to achieve a particular result or leading to a particular result. Therefore, the construction of different managerial spaces on this earth is a result of a series of actions taken with spatial experience and changes over time. Accordingly, the end result of managerial space is led by the spatial processes associated with spatial changes in the world. Particular example can be given with reference to the managerial decisions and space developed in the South East Asian Region in the recent past. This emphasizes management as a spatial process as the managerial decisions to adopt export led industrialization through multinational firms, utilize labour as the crucial locational factor for their industrial development etc. were taken through the analysis of spatial aspects and processes emphasized by geographers. Accordingly, managerial strategies may transform from one strategy to another creating a spatial demarcation of such strategies. It performs as a process creating spatial changes over time with the generation, degeneration and regeneration of strategies. For example, green marketing strategies were generated by spatial processes, as the economies in different regions demand environmental friendly products and practices due to the environmental pollution in different geographical spaces. Thus, it incorporates a broad range of management strategies including product process development, product modifications, sustainable packaging etc. as the consumers become more environmentally conscious than ever before. By summarizing all the aspects above the validity of geography in management can be justified in terms of the following three main study approaches.

Geography of management: This simply emphasizes management as a geographic phenomenon changing from place to place. How managerial concepts, strategies and practices change from country to country, region to region, from specific place to another and what causes affect such spatial differences and changes are emphasized and studied here. Not only the objective space but also the subjective space of management is taken into consideration at micro and macro level.

Geography behind management: This emphasizes the importance of geography in management. In the decision making process of management spatial aspects and processes have become crucial factors particularly in attaining internal and external economies of firms. For example, how multinational companies at present respond in taking their decisions on how to produce is based on geographical analysis. Due to the significance of geography basic economic and managerial decisions have also changed from how to produce to where to produce. This has resulted in shifting multinationals from developed regions to East, South and South-east Asian regions by evaluating and selecting specific geographic localities as the locations of their new firms due to cheap and abundant labour, gender division and socio cultural values of such spaces.

Management behind geography: To explain the spatial arrangement of various geographic phenomenon geographers also depend on management. For example, spatial concentration and the agglomeration of various economic and administrative activities in particular regions can be justified as a result of top-down managerial approach.

CONFIRMATION THROUGH GEOGRAPHICAL CONCEPTS APPLIED IN MANAGEMENT

Various geographical concepts are significantly applied in the field of management. Among them the following are specific in marketing, human resources and tourism management. Some concepts such as geo-marketing and geography of tourism are identified as sub disciplines in management.

Geo-marketing

Geo-marketing is the integration of geographical intelligence into various aspects of marketing including sales and distribution. It is a discipline within marketing analysis which uses geo location in the process of planning and implementation of marketing activities. It has a direct impact on the development of modern trade and the reorganization of retail types as the site selection becomes automated and based on scientific procedure that saves both time and money. It is successfully applied in the field of marketing creating hotspots maps based on geographical parameters integrated with customer behavior particularly by using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Spatial division of labour in Labour Studies and HRM

Division of labour is an economic concept which states that dividing the production process into different stages enables workers to focus on specific tasks. When workers concentrate on one small aspect of production it leads to increase overall efficiency. This concept was introduced by Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776.

In labour studies and human resource management this concept is significantly applied to achieve workers' efficiency through specialization by the division of work and labour. It has led to attain internal economies of scale within the company environment of many organizations. However, spatial division of labour is merely a geographic concept significantly applied in HRM and labour studies to attain external economies of scale from labour at micro and macro level. Particularly at micro level firms spatially divide labour through sub-contracting process to reduce the labour cost. At macro level this happens through international division of labour which is an outcome of the globalization process. The term was coined by theorists seeking to explain the spatial shift of manufacturing industries from advanced capitalists' countries to developing countries – an ongoing geographic reorganization of production which finds its origins in ideas about a global division of labour. They represent whole new sets of relations between activities in different places, new spatial forms of social organizations, new dimensions of inequality and new relations of dominance and dependence (Massey, 1995).

Green HRM, Greenfield sites and Geographical distance

Recently there has been increasing awareness within business organizations on the significance of going green and adopting various environment management practices. Green HRM is the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of human resources within business organizations, more generally promoting the cause of environmental sustainability.

The concept of Greenfield site within human resource management indicates the ways in which geographical distance is conceptualized or measured in human resource management practices. It is particularly important when comparing different studies and in attempting to introduce new HRM practices on Greenfield sites. The geographical distance factors may impose a constraint on the introduction of new HRM practices at a green field sites when the site's distance from a firm's exiting operations, its distance from geographical concentration of similar economic activities and its distance from regions with traditional pattern of management- employee relations. Accordingly it is argued that it is inappropriate to treat the

green field factor as a dichotomous variable as there are various shades of green particularly emphasized by geographers (Richbell and Watts, 2001).

Geography of tourism in tourism management

The connection between tourism geography and tourism management is linked to specific terms such as place, location, space, accessibility etc. emphasized in the subject of geography. Tourism is an integrative character, containing key elements from all fields of geography such as physical, human, cultural and economic landscape. Besides, tourism geography has many common points with other sciences such as history, geology, biology, economics and even management. As such, tourism geography studies things like tourist resources, tourist's infrastructure, tourist circulation and tourist markets which are significantly emphasized in tourism management. Accordingly, the areas of geographical interest in tourism management are particularly emphasized by the scientist like Hall and Page (2009).

CONFIRMATION THROUGH DECISION MAKING IN MANAGEMENT

The geography behind management can further be justified with reference to three main managerial decisions on resource allocation, production and distribution. In any economy the following decisions in the production process will have to be taken and it is unfair and not logical to conclude that such managerial decisions are only lead by economics and it is a policy imperative to understand the importance of geography behind such managerial decisions as well.

Allocation decisions

This mainly refers to the decision of resource allocation in economics and production management. As the resources are limited and the human needs are unlimited this decision mainly depends on the opportunity cost which is identified as the loss of potential gain from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen. Even though the decision of what to produce is a problem of resource allocation in economics and management it is also lead by various geographical factors in different spaces of the world (Hodder and Lee, 1974). Accordingly the decision of what to produce is not only an economic problem but also a geographic problem, as the decision should be taken according to the geographic facts of different spaces. For example, the managerial decision to produce consumer or capital goods of a certain region or country should be determined by the size of the population. If the

population is high in a particular region more consumer goods need to be produced due to the high demand for consumer goods. If the resources are not sufficient in such spaces the decision of to whom it is produced is also taken by analyzing the needs and requirements of different spaces.

Production decisions

The decision of how to produce is also viewed in economic perspective in managerial economics but it is obvious that the geography behind management has completely been neglected in this regard. The decision of selecting appropriate technology is completely a geographic phenomenon, as the decision should be taken according to the geographic fact of labour and capital. In geographical spaces where labour is abundant labour intensive technology should be adopted while capital intensive methods should be practiced in the spaces where labour is scarce. For example, the managerial decision of multinationals on how to produce has completely been directed by spatial processes at present, as they analyze and evaluate different spaces in taking their locational decisions to establish their firms in the world. As emphasized by the product cycle model (Vernon, 1966 and Hirsch, 1967) spatial transformation of multinational firms from more developed regions and countries to less developed regions and countries is a result of spatial evaluation of comparative advantages of various geographical spaces and regions.

Distributional decisions

Traditionally, decisions of to whom the goods and services are produced are mainly analyzed by the nature of economy. In a simple economy the needs are limited and in a complex economy it is lead by the division of labour and its specialization as the needs are so complex and unlimited. But in managerial economics this decision is over simplified and the geography behind this issue has completely been neglected. Taking the decision of to whom goods and services are produced on the basis of the nature of economy has become a narrow perspective in the current decision making process as it is lead by some other very important spatial aspects in the world at present. Marketing strategy of China is a very good example to emphasize the extent to which geography behind managerial decisions has become important in leading the economies in the world. By analyzing the market segments spatially and geographically China used the concept of purchasing power and affordability to capture the world market producing different quality levels for various spaces particularly identifying the nature of the market in developing countries.

WORLD PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT UNIVERSITIES

Having understood the importance of geography behind management the following universities in the world particularly in UK, USA and Canada are offering even degrees in Geography and Management.

- B. Sc. Degree in Geography with Business Management offered by Queens Mary, University of London, UK (www.qmul.ac.uk).
- B. Sc. (Hons) Degree in Geography and Management offered by Loughborough University, UK (www.lboro.ac.uk).
- B. Sc. Degree in Geography and Environmental Management offered by University of Waterloo, Canada (<http://uwaterloo.ca/geography>).
- B. Sc. Degree in Geography and Management offered by University of Aberdeen, UK (www.abdn.ac.uk/study/courses).
- B. Sc. (Hons.) Degree in Geography and Environmental Management offered by Northumbria University, UK (www.northumbria.ac.uk).
- M.Sc. Degree in Environmental Management and Energy Studies offered by the University of Johannesburg, South Africa (www.uj.ac.za).
- B. A. and B. Sc. (Hons.) Degree in Business and Management and Geography offered by Bath SPA University, UK (www.bathspa.ac.uk/).
- B. A. Geography and Management joint honours degree offered in conjunction with the School of Geography in Leeds University Business School (www.business.leeds.ac.uk).

As a case of justification, rationale and the content of the Course in Economic and Business Geography offered by the Department of Geography of the University of Washington, USA can also be quoted.

As stated by them;

“We draw not only from geographic theory, explanatory frameworks and analytical methods, but also from economics, business administration and other disciplines. We are interested in practical problems and 'real world' issues in the private and public sectors and try to connect these problems and issues to established and emerging bodies of theories and methodologies in order to enhance our understanding and the bases for potential intervention. In addition to many remaining similarities, Economic and Business Geography today looks quite different from what it was just a few years

ago. A much increased emphasis is now placed on societal and economic facets such as communication related transactions in the space economy, spatial interactions and economic dependence and inter dependence, rapid restructuring in the service sector, how to run own small businesses, international economic flows, inter-organizational strategic alliances, changes in the nature of job and work, and peculiarities of systems of economic activities”

(<http://faculty.washington.edu/krumme/ecbusgeo.html>).

As the course content of Business and Economic Geography they cover E-Commerce, Labor Markets, Infrastructure, Industrial Linkages, Tele-Communications, Information Economy, International Trade, Technological Change, Transportation Studies, Resource Use & Analysis, Location Theory & Analysis, Retail & Marketing Geography, Regional & Global Development, Corporate Spatial Organization and Spatial Organization of Services.

TEXT BOOKS PUBLISHED

Various textbooks directly related to Geography and Management have also significantly been published and some of the references are given below.

- Baum, J. A. C. and Sorenson, O. (2003) (Edt.) *Advances in Strategic Management: Geography and Strategy*, Emerald Publishers. In the content it covers the topics: The Strategic Management of Space and Place, Managing Knowledge Spillovers: The Role of Geographic Proximity, Location and Organizing Strategy: Exploring the Influence of Location on the Organization of Pharmaceutical Research, Geography and Marketing Strategy in Consumer Packaged Goods, Spatial Diffusion of Social Organization etc. (www.emeraldinsight.com/books.htm)
- Lammarino, S. and McCann, P. (2013) *Multinationals and Economic Geography*. Edward Elgar Publishing. It addresses the topics such as Multinational Enterprises, Innovation and Geography in Today's Globalized World, Multinationals, Location and Innovation, Theories of Multinational Enterprises, Firm Location Behaviour in Theory, The Sources of Innovation, Multinationals, Variety of Geographies and Evolution, Globalization and Multinationals in a Historical Process.
(www.e-elgar.co.uk/bookentry_main.lasso)
- Thrall, G. I. (2002) *Business Geography and New Real Estate Market Analysis (Spatial Information Systems)*. Oxford University Press. This focuses on integrating

land use location science with the technology of Geographic Information System (GIS). It describes the basic principles of location decision and the means for applying them in order to improve the real estate decisions.

- Stutz, F. P. and Warf, B. (2011) *The world Economy: Geography, Business, Development*. Prentice Hall. This explores contemporary geographic topics and perspectives relating to the world economy. It provides strong theoretical and practical foundation for understanding the global economy, restructuring economies and regional realignments. (www.pearsonhigered.com)
- Laulajainen, R and Stafford, H. A. (1995) *Corporate Geography*. This examines the spatial structures and behaviour of large business organizations. Each corporation has several locations and connections to suppliers and customers who also operate in geographical space. The effectiveness of corporate spatial organizations is of importance for their well being and for the health of the national and local economies in which they operate. (www.springer.com)
- Moretti, E. (2012) *The New Geography of Jobs*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publisher. This mainly discusses about innovative companies and workers create economic gains and prosperity. It emphasizes that most of the gains accrue to the areas they occur - mostly cities. It means geography determines economic validity.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to justify the importance of geography to the field of management, as its main objective is to emphasize the role of geography in management at this international forum. For this matter it covered the very relevant themes of geography to the field of management and its decision making. Management as a spatial phenomenon and spatial process, geographical concepts applied in management, how geography is important in the process of managerial decision making, universities offering the degree programmes in geography and management and the text books published in this field are the matters discussed in the paper to justify the objective addressed in the paper. How geography is important as geography of management, geography behind management and the management behind geography further confirmed the addressed objective.

Geographical scope and the perspective and the literature clearly indicate the extent to which geography is important to the field of management in different perspectives. From the

literature it is very clear that the world has understood its significance but unfortunately any of the management faculties in Sri Lanka is still not aware of the importance of this subject. Two decades ago senior members of these faculties had introduced commercial and economic geography as a subject to the commerce degree programme but it has also been excluded by now after the new syllabus revision. It seems that academics and practitioners in the field of education and knowledge management are still not well aware of spatial processes in the world and the geography behind management.

When emphasizing geography of management, the art of knowing what you want to do as emphasized by Taylor (cited in George, 2009) has a geographical identity as the art of knowing significantly varies according to different geographical spaces. Management is a spatial process as different managerial spaces can be identified and demarcated in the world at macro or micro level. Thus, it is essential to understand the geography behind management in different aspects as discussed in the paper.

As argued in the paper, various geographical concepts are significantly applied in the field of management. Accordingly, geo-marketing is the integration of geographical intelligence into various aspects of marketing including sales, distribution and the location of marketing centers. Spatial division of labour is merely a geographic concept significantly applied in HRM and labour studies to attain external economies of scale from labour at micro and macro level. It is particularly important to address the factors relating to geographical distance in introducing new HRM practices on Greenfield sites as the geographical distance may impose a constraint on the introduction of new HRM practices at a green field sites. The subject matters like tourist resources, tourist's infrastructure, tourist circulation and tourist markets, which are emphasized in tourism management, are significantly studied in tourism geography. In the decision making process of management all the decisions are considerably led by geographical factors as emphasized in the paper. In addition, different universities in the world are offering even degrees in geography and management having understood the importance of geography behind management and various text books have also been published directly relating geography and management.

Not like in our primitive stage now the world is open to anybody to understand what is going on behind the screen of managerial decision making process in the world. Geography and innovation are closely linked disciplines and it is hardly to talk about innovation without

geography, as it has been proved since the evolution. Therefore, it is time for you to think the need and the importance of this subject for creative business management practices at present and in future. As we are now in a globalized world can management survive apart from spatial processes? Acceptance or the rejection of the arguments of the author is up to you at the 13th International Conference on Business Management, 2016.

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