A Comparative Historical / Methodological Analysis of Two Studies about the Manager's Job.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two major research streams concerning the manager's job are examined, highlighting their historical evolution and the methodological processes followed in knowledge generation. Different dimensions of the knowledge generation process are considered such as research questions, influences, data and methods, categorization process, research output, and reconsiderations. It is shown that neither of the two research streams saw their original intentions realized. Implications regarding management education are briefly discussed.

Keywords: Manager’s job; Competencies; Research methodology, Epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the job of management has generally been pursued for the sake of supporting the design of management education programs and executive development programs. In 1973, Henry Mintzberg published a landmark empirically based study on the nature of managerial work (Mintzberg, 1973). He identified ten managerial roles. In 1994, he developed an alternative model of the managerial job (Mintzberg, 1994). He pursued the subject in several articles and books (Mintzberg, 2004, 2009). In 1991, another landmark study, also empirically based, was published in the UK, funded by a grant from the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council (Mangham & Pye, 1991).

In general, qualitative research methods are used to develop descriptions of the manager’s job, with grounded-theory methodology being the contemporary exemplar. The developed descriptions are or should be grounded in empirical observations. There is flexibility in the application of the qualitative methods. Some researchers highlight the inductive nature of the coding categories. Others may already be committed to a theoretical framework, which they will use to generate the categories. Most of the researchers will have a combination of inductive categories and theoretically grounded categories. The purely inductive approach would be along the line of descriptive condensation of a large number of observations o, in some cases, with some touches of theory building. On the other hand, when theoretical categories are used, the observations as a whole will presumably fit in the categories derived from the theoretical framework, along the lines of theory justification or validation.

Besides direct research on the manager’s job, there are other streams of tributary research. The issue of learning from experience has been investigated and reported in a variety of venues, as well as its connections with sensemaking, leading, and organizing (Pye, 1993, 1994, 2002, 2005). Other studies have approached the problem of the type of management education needed at the university level and also at the practitioner’s level (Mintzberg, 2004; Colff, 2004; Datar, Garvin, &Cullen, 2010; Elmuti, 2004; Trim, 2004).

This research will develop a historical and methodological analysis of knowledge generation about the manager’s job. Two major empirically based studies will be used as exemplars: Henry Mintzber’s 1973 study (as well as the follow up studies) and Mangham and Pye’s study. The following aspects of their work will be analyzed: (a) context and initial research purposes, (b) research questions, (c) research influences, (d) data and methods, (e) categorization processes, (f) research