

Increasing Relevance of Research Paradigms in Future Management

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Abstract

We have seen the progress of management research for several decades till now. At the same time, business world is rapidly progressing in terms of technology, strategic thinking and management techniques. How many of us are willing to acknowledge that theory has played an important role in evolution of corporate practices? Very few... once MBAs get their convocation certificates they step into the work-life and forget all about theories. It's high time that we realize the journey and interdependence of theory and practice in management world. Have we wondered how the management paradigms differ from those of other disciplines?

This paper looks at the bridge between theory and practice with the help of 5 propositions; in how the research paradigms have evolved over time and are currently serving the corporates by incorporating their needs in addition to broadening the understanding of academicians. Misconceptions regarding paradigms as ready-made solutions must be evaded before adapting them into real-world scenarios. The inherent flexibility of paradigms renders the scope for paradigm shifts from time to time. Still they cannot be fitted into templates. Paradigms generate knowledge; guide actions and are in turn shaped by strategic actions.
Keywords- paradigms, theory, practice, management

Curtain Raiser

Managers in the current digitized world look for gains and measurable results in whatever they adopt for the world of management. There is lot of mobility of capital across borders, emergence of trading blocks and common currencies, free movement of skilled manpower, instant flow of information, quick transport, and fastest means of communication. The philosophy of management looks for logic in the theory and paradigms that evolve and sustain the times of testing and practice. Have we reached a stage where a manager from Harvard or IIM finds herself at the crossroads of choosing between theory and practice or is she well-equipped to converge the two paths into creating a sensible and result-oriented paradigm that is ultimately converted into the real-world business strategies? The paper takes a look at the utility of paradigms in the current business world and how creating a harmony between theory and practice is better than experimenting with theory or learning by trial-and-error alone. We raise certain concerns on whether paradigms can be template or not, and if they can be aligned with actions in any particular sequence. Relevant industry examples are provided. If academicians conduct research to understand the fundamental concepts in a field, the professionals too conduct research to understand the product or services and increase their acceptance according to the market needs. Both have to handle the environmental uncertainty and this is where the connecting thread to paradigms is created. Both have dependencies in the form of converging from theory to practice or practice to theory at some time or the other. In the process of understanding the mentioned aspects, we develop four key propositions to

clarify the role and scope of research paradigms in the current times. The key finding is that paradigms at least in the field of management cannot be put into a fixed template as that defies their role and purpose.

Theory building in management vs. other disciplines

Theory has been evolving in various disciplines like sciences, engineering, medicine, arts, management, mathematics etc. Management is itself a vast area encompassing branches like finance, marketing, human resources, supply chain, strategy, economics, etc. that this area alone has seen tremendous theory-building that is commendable when put against physical sciences or biological sciences together. The impact of Theory development upon field development is adjudged through its contribution to paradigm development that in turn determines the scientific progress (Pfeffer, 1993) and/or paradigm diversification (Cannella and Paetzold, 1994; Van Maanen, 1995). It enriches the field by addressing and identifying the key questions defining that field and by creating unique theoretical frameworks not present in other fields. This creates independence of theoretical frameworks from other fields and increases citation rates within other field journals thus enhancing the legitimacy of that field. It also helps build the institutional infrastructure surrounding a field in terms of proliferation of journals with greater academic standing, professional associations, conferences, academic appointments and attraction of a community of researchers (Busenitz et al. 2003 and Low, 2001). This may be a reason why management is at times called both a science and an art. It is a science by virtue of its paradigms and is an art by virtue of its immense horizon and scope for creativity and interaction with other fields.

Management has not built its theories in isolation but in combination with other disciplines like social sciences and natural sciences. This theoretical synthesis has further enriched and revised theories of competitive advantage in the strategy field. It has also led to a lot of follow-up research that capitalizes on the intersection with theories from organizational economics (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992), population ecology (Barnett et al., 1994), institutional theory (Oliver, 1997) and organizational learning (Lei et al., 1996). The RBV has also interacted with other disciplines such as marketing, international business, entrepreneurship, production management and HRM, leading to the proliferation of schools of thought that embrace the inherent paradoxes within the theory (Lado et al., 2006). This research has lent greater credence to organizational scholarship generally while compelling managers to deepen their understanding of how they can proactively create competitive advantages. More specifically, these scholars imply that theories in management have resulted out of experiential analysis as against experimental analysis that has led to theory-formation in other fields like Sciences, and Maths where experiments have led to formulae that remain unchanged under all conditions. Experiential analysis brings into focus the experience during a given occasion under certain circumstances. It is liable to deriving implications out of observation and hence is prone to biases. Unlike other fields management is not bound by typologies, metaphors or categorizations. There is hence a lack of predictability and control in management theories. This has been overcome to a great extent with scholars working on creating constructs say, in Strategy theories that support predictions to a certain extent with a certain probability. Thus Management is more of an 'experiential experimentation' where the immense scope for experimentation lies in the actors' ability to experience different roles and actions and create unique real/natural observations for paradigms to emerge scientifically. Different fields within management – finance, marketing, strategy, human resources, information systems, supply chain, operations etc. – render the expanse for experimentation. The researchers in these fields are the actors who use their experience, knowledge and other scholars' expertise in creating new channels of experiments

with their truths, testing, validating them and releasing as paradigms during a given time period. Further experiences take the form of new experiments that refine or redefine the paradigms. All experiences or experiments take place in the field –real corporate or business world where these paradigms see establishment, modifications, renewals or refinements. Thus there is a close bonding between experience and research in the formation of paradigms in management.

Evolution of paradigms

...from yesteryears to 2000s

Paradigm comes from the Greek *paradeiknyai* - to show side by side – and is a pattern or example of something. The word connotes the ideas of a mental picture or pattern of thought. Research uses theories, constructs and variables to study, design and measure results. Theories are the systematic ways of understanding events. Relationships between variables explain these events on the basis of constructs. Constructs are the key concepts developed for use in a given theory. Constructs are measured on the basis of variables. Variables are the independent or dependent factors representing causes and effects (Smith, Mackie, 2000). A Research design is defined based on the research paradigm that in turn is defined around a conceptual framework. In the entire journey, paradigms have accompanied theory and practice in the times they lived as explained below.

Research paradigm as referred by Thomas Kuhn (1962) is a model resulting out of a scientific achievement providing answers to a set of problems for a time. The model is not bounded and can be used to simplify new problems within the scope of prevailing framework. A paradigm contains a set of first principles or basic beliefs around which theories are built within the legitimate limits of research. The three major research paradigms are:

1. Interpretivism: This is the qualitative approach that assumes that the whole needs to be examined in order to understand a phenomenon. According to researchers like Denzin, Holbrook, Hirschman, McCracken, Mick, Rook, Solomon, Tucker, Hudson & Murray, Grayson, Sherry, Belk and Wallendorf – interpretivism is an approach of seeking knowledge by expanding the horizons. The process of knowledge construction depends on the quality of interpretation. Theories are shaped by the iterative and inductive¹ reasoning thus providing good problem-solving ability.
2. Positivism: This is an objective approach and is the most dominant paradigm. Quantitative research follows this paradigm. Reality according to positivism is not time or context bound unlike in interpretivism. Reality can be generalized (Bower et al, 1981). Knowledge is accurate and is based on verified hypotheses/ laws/ facts. Reality is governed by unchangeable cause-effect laws. Russell, Austin and Ayer (1978) emphasized on the aspects of verifiability and meaningfulness of reality/ truth. Positivism that is established by testing or formulating logic or verified by experience is the logical positivism or logical empiricism.
3. Critical Theory: Max Horkheimer of Frankfurt School (Institute of Social Research, Frankfurt) played a major role in developing the critical theory. This is a reflective and dialectical approach that explores the social world, critiques it, and enables people to understand how society functions and methods by which unsatisfactory aspects can be changed. It is governed by conflicting, underlying structures (social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender). Theories are built from analysing power relationships. The research is influenced by the values of the researcher.

¹ Generates theory, inferences based on assumptions

For example, interpretivists consider emotions and feelings to be perceptual, voluntary and time- and context- bound in human beings. Positivists prefer to understand the reality and relationships of patterns of behaviour to generalize them to other contexts. Emotions are seen as reactive and deterministic. On the contrary, a Critical theory would assume the human being to be rational and would analyse the causes behind an emotional outburst to find a solution to the problem. The recent years have seen a marked movement from realist to interpretivist paradigms in management.

Kuhn (1962) divided disciplinary matrix into four apartments, which include symbols, shared beliefs, shared values and typical examples. And disciplinary matrix is the same as paradigm. So, following the disciplinary matrix of the concept of Kuhn, Taylor's scientific management paradigm (Taylor, 1911) is divided four apartments: the common beliefs of Taylor's scientific management paradigm, the shared values of Taylor's scientific management paradigm, the formula of Taylor's scientific management paradigm and the symbolic example of Taylor's scientific management. The common belief that the members of the scientific community's commitment to abide by. The same as what kind of scientific community is the eye of the world. This is belonging to Ontology. Taylor's scientific management paradigm of the ontological belief is that the scientific point on the management. Common value refers to all of the scientific community shared the same value, Taylor's scientific management paradigm of shared values is through scientific means to improve management efficiency. Taylor's scientific management paradigm is that there are a wide variety of mathematical formulas or text symbols to express general formula. A typical example refers to a paradigm of the typical achievements. Taylor's scientific management paradigm as the beginning of modern management, of many management principles of its founders is called a model in the history of management. The third part is the methodology of Taylor's scientific management. There are two apartments. The first is to introduce a positivism methodology of Taylor. It includes: an empirical principle, causality principle, simplicity principle, quantitative principle, the principle of segregation analysis. The second block is to introduce the scientific method of Taylor's management study, according to scientific research methods, divided into observation and experiments, induction, model building three steps. The fourth part is the historical position and its impact of Taylor's scientific management paradigm. A paradigm will have been pre-paradigm period, the period of establishment and development of paradigms and paradigm change period. Taylor's scientific management paradigm cannot escape such a rule. In the study of pre-paradigm period, there are a variety of theories, there is no uniform view. Taylor's scientific management paradigm makes the view of study is unified. Management has been established from this. Taylor's scientific management paradigm influences the subsequent development of management theory. Taylor's scientific management paradigm affects the establishment of management. Taylor's scientific management paradigm affects the whole of the United States and around the world. But as paradigm base on mechanical view, Taylor's scientific management paradigm has its drawbacks too. Finally, it is replaced by people-management paradigm.

Can any paradigm be strictly templated?

Paradigms can be treated as templates for a given period of time under which the given assumptions hold true and the underlying conditions are consistent with the paradigm framework. Once the conditions change, the paradigm shifts to a new platform on which it can sustain for a certain period of time as long as new conditions do not emerge. The discipline of management is thus subject to the forces of 'creative destruction' as the phenomena it seeks to describe (Kuhn, 1962). Often the measures used to evaluate a

paradigm undergo additions or editions. The challenge is to attain the right mix of continuity, which builds the absorptive capacity of researchers, and novelty, which maintains relevance and incentivizes the search for better ideas (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Markóczy and Deeds, 2009; McKinley et al., 1999). Again a paradigm cannot be strictly templated as an algorithm or a flowchart because the conditions under which a particular paradigm is acceptable vary from situation to situation and within sub-fields of management. To understand this, we need to be clear about what exactly paradigms can do and what they are meant for.

Research paradigms in management in the modern world - brief analysis are of two uses-

- a) Paradigms act as problem-solvers to the real-world business issues.
- b) They have the flexibility and capability to respond to changes by means of paradigm shifts.

The next sections explain these two aspects in detail.

Paradigms not as choice but as ‘problem-solvers’

A direct application of paradigms is seen in the information technology age thus bringing a direct correlation between the business success and research theories. Burke (2007) has examined a variety of research approaches which information managers may find useful to meet the needs of working in the networked, digitized age. This is achieved by a discussion of the research paradigms inherent within both information theory and social theory. The findings work towards a final justification for an interpretivist approach as the most appropriate context in which to work, in order to meet the emerging trends and current challenges of information technology management.

The qualitative and quantitative methods that are extensively used in the current business world are the result of the paradigms (Ferber and Verdoorn, 1967). Quantitative research is commonly used to investigate research questions, scientifically explain, predict and control phenomena. The purpose of quantitative research is to test theory. It follows stable pre-existing patterns or an order that can be discovered. Usually, quantitative research utilizes quantitative methods that adopt a hypothetico-deductive approach to constructing theories. The research follows a systematic way of postulating theories from verified hypotheses. Hypothetico-deductive approach as coined by William Whewell and popularized by Karl Popper (1970) follows the falsification of hypotheses to dismiss the non-testable hypotheses (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2003). The probabilistic nature confirms or rejects theory from observable phenomena on large groups and is true in most situations. The theories act as models or general propositions to explain causal relationships between variables. Qualitative research studies the mental, social and cultural phenomena and describes multiple realities based on beliefs, values, reasons and understandings (Cooper & Schindler, 2002). The purpose of qualitative research is to build a theory that offers a perspective of the situation and provide research reports describing a particular phenomenon. Exploratory² studies rely more heavily on qualitative techniques.

The business paradigm as may be termed against the research paradigm forms its basis in the theoretical frameworks on various relevant streams like theories of motivation (for managing employee satisfaction), strategic management (mission/ vision formation, goal formation and strategy implementation, customer relationship management), or financial management (profit, sales) or innovation management or corporate social responsibility (Figure 1).

² Exploration is useful when researchers lack a clear idea of problems they will meet during the study.

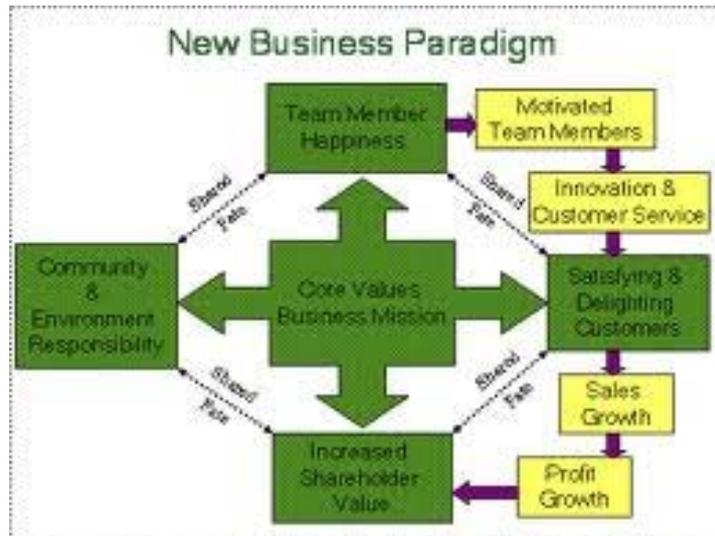
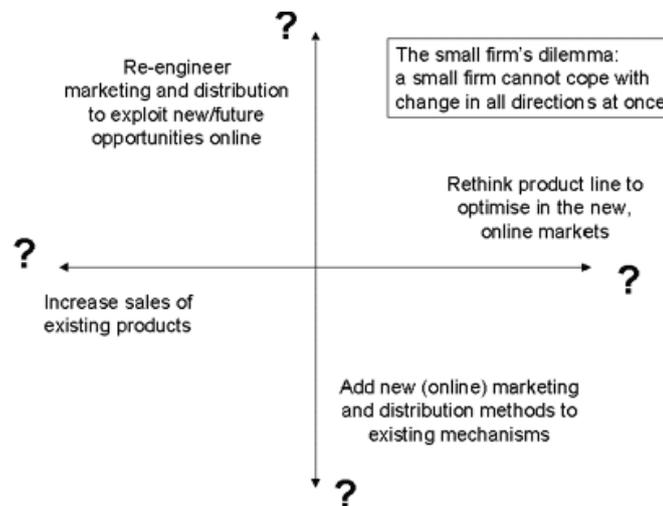


Figure 1-Business paradigm with roots in Research paradigm

The answers to the environmental uncertainty lie in the understanding of theories. The dilemmas could be for small or large firms and could be related to sales, reengineering, or product lines (Fig 2).



Source: ecom-ctr workshop, <http://www.eto.org.uk/trade/ecom-ctr>

Figure 2-Business dilemmas

A firm cannot form its profitability strategies unless it understands how the theories of transaction costs, cost of manufacturing goods, revenues, pricing and volumes impact the equation of profit or loss. Similarly a manager who is not aware of the different motivation theories cannot understand the behaviour of employees and may make wrong decisions based on wrong interpretations. As an example, GE, IBM and other top firms have established 'universities' within their companies to provide education to the employees (Madhavi, 2010) and the education is not limited to trainings but extends to give an overview of the relevant theories like hygiene factors, financial theories like CAPM or valuation concepts, investment theories etc.

A new paradigm – Design-based research paradigm is emerging especially in the area of education research and enquiry where laboratory-based experiments do not provide adequate answers. It aims at using technological tools and theories to transform education into innovative learning environment by producing theories that improve teaching in naturalistic settings. Education is an applied field and learning scientists have transformative agendas. Hence a systematic understanding of the relationship between educational theories,

artifacts and practices is needed to predict how learning occurs. It entails engineering particular forms of learning and systematically studying those forms of learning within the context defined by means of supporting them. Methodological standards and research processes have not yet been fully developed for this paradigm. This sets the ground for our next section on paradigm shifts.

Proposition 1 – The role of paradigms is not as solution per se but to act as providers of solution. Paradigms provide a range of choices by creating scenarios under different sets of conditions. Solutions emerge out of the paradigms depending on the issues at hand.

Which comes first – paradigm or action?

Paradigm and action follow each other at different times. Sometimes, the action is necessary to identify the conditions prevailing at a time and the common problems in the management world. Then the paradigm can be constructed meaningfully. When the conditions are not clear then the paradigm can be built first and modified according to the changes taking place in the management world. For example, if all management firms procure raw material from their own sources then the problem may be related to the varying cost of raw material by different sources, the paradigm cannot be judged initially but derived as and when the companies face new conditions and problems under them since not all conditions can be anticipated in the beginning.

Any revolution means progress towards new paradigms and not upsetting the existing paradigms. The innovation opportunities arising from the paradigms also give rise to interaction between the industry of application and the scientific discipline. Management actions get meaning when the work is meaningful (Lips-Wiersma, Morris, 2009). Management of meaning stems from the meaningful work as argued by the scholars. They suggest that it is better to experiment with the paradigms first and fail rather than failing in the real management (actions) and that scholars must hence try for meaningful research that will guide the management actions in the business world. Smircich and Stubbart (1985) also stress the role of managers in delivering management of meaning. Their experiences and organizational events must provide a vision to account for the actions. They must inspire meaning in organizational life that researchers are studying by understanding symbolic realities, symbol systems and symbolic expression to see how processes interact in organizations to produce meaningful management. Paradigms must be meaningful to suit the organizations as organisms and that are themselves socially constructed systems of shared meaning. Environments are created due to interactions of organizational participants. Paradigms are converted into powerful actions by using metaphors to convey the direction and commitment by managers (Burrell, & Morgan, 1979; Morgan, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Broms & Gahmberg, 1983; Peters, 1978). Thus in this sense paradigms come first and then the actions.

Proposition 2 (a) – Paradigms precede actions when they create meaningful work to be evinced into management actions of meaning.

In another sense, actions precede paradigms. Some scholars argue that actions have always been present with or without paradigms and even before paradigms formally evolved (Shapere 1971, Popper 1970). Knowledge diverges from current trajectories of paradigms when contemporary developments do not support the constraints of given paradigms. In that case scientists are forced to shed the accepted constraints in search of new understanding based on the natural observations. Scholars believe that actions in the form of revolution are necessary for establishment of paradigms and for new ones to evolve since paradigms represent belief systems or simply the current state of scientific understanding. The common feature of all paradigms is that they represent the status quo against which success of progress

is gauged. Data and evidence are accumulated to bestow generality to paradigms (Barber 1961). The presence of actions alone can guarantee evolution of data and evidence. In case of management paradigms cases of real-world business provide the required evidence to sustain and reinforce the paradigms. Such data collection ensures that the generalities of accepted paradigms are not refuted, bringing them into closer agreement with facts. At the same time, paradigms exist on the base that they must support the patterns of observations in nature (Loehle 1987). Patterns essentially arise from actions. Accepted paradigms must be able to represent natural patterns. These patterns may also create anomalies when conflicting data arises out of actions. Extraordinary research and revolution followed by empirical testing is needed to refine the paradigms and to avoid anomalies (Hutchinson 1957).

Proposition 2 (b)- Actions are needed to create the paradigms, guide their constraints, generalities as well as create acceptance and to keep the evolution of paradigms in flux. Actions also precede paradigms when evidence is needed to establish paradigms or data generates new knowledge for creating new paradigms. Both data and evidence emerge only out of existing management actions and practices as they can neither be assumed nor imagined. Actions are needed to reinforce paradigms. Also, paradigms are formed and subsequently modified in order to explain the observed patterns in nature. In this case also actions are needed for patterns that are needed for paradigms.

Can any paradigm bridge the knowing-doing gap?

Paradigms provide a framework to handle a particular set of problems in a given period of time under a given set of assumptions. However, the implementation is different from the knowledge captured by a framework. The knowledge is limited to theoretical foundations and threads related to the paradigm. The doing part involves putting in the right parameters into the paradigm and deriving the solutions for the problems. The next step is to interpret the results to take remedial steps. Interpretation is subject to bias and perceptions of the interpreter. The remedial steps suggested and the subsequent results further on, indicate the extent to which that paradigm is successful in solving the given problem. Sometimes knowing is itself as good as doing. Sfard (2005) argues that good research in Mathematics is much more relevant than practice as new findings set the future direction for education in Maths. Of course, this is true to a great extent in management. First, a researcher needs to know how to conduct quantitative and qualitative research, interpret actors' voices (participants' responses) and assess the impact of/on working paradigms that the new research is going to have. Good research is the one that leads to new knowledge creation (Kuhn, 1962). After this the practical applications come into picture if the proposed paradigm fits the world of business and in what form. Knowledge creation is linked to entrepreneurial opportunity recognition that encourages innovation. Finally it leads to economic growth. This is the cyclical paradigm shifting dynamic described by Kuhn. Thus new knowledge leads to discovery of opportunities that may be a part of knowledge breakthroughs, giving rise to entrepreneurial activity. Innovation is sought to meet the new needs and this links the growth of industry, technology and economy. Technology is a facilitator of generating, implementing and executing innovation. Thus paradigm can bridge the knowing-doing gap but only with the help of technology and not alone.

Proposition 3— research paradigms generate knowledge. Paradigms have inherent flexibility to respond to environmental changes due to which paradigm shifts occur and the knowing-doing gap, can be best bridged with innovations meeting the new unmet needs in the environment that arise out of the new knowledge. Technology being the enabler of innovation is the best sealer of knowing-doing gap. This develops a broad relationship between paradigms on one side of the bridge at the *knowledge* coast and technology on the other side of the bridge at the *doing* coast.

Based on the above discussion and propositions we can arrive at the concluding proposition as it is clear that paradigms are not keys but tools to unlocking mysteries of management world. Others may support the same in the form of technology, knowledge etc, but paradigms themselves cannot solely be relied upon to provide ready-made solutions. Times change and problems change. Change is constant in the management world. For the same reason, paradigms cannot be locked under a template or two. One paradigm may operate under several assumptions while another may obviate the need for any. One paradigm may exist for hundreds of years while another may undergo modifications intermittently. Paradigms may help create templates and formulae but they cannot become one. Paradigms depend upon actions and determine actions too but paradigms cannot become actions. It is equivalent to say that paradigms are not variables but use variables to establish their application. To apply paradigms we need to understand their limitations and focus. If paradigms are templated then we would be defining their limitation which is not natural, their applicability will hence be again subject to bias of the template.

Proposition 4 – No paradigm can be strictly assigned to a template like a Maths formula or a programme algorithm merely because of its assumptions/constraints and role. A paradigm serves to solve problems but cannot be a solution in itself. The assumptions and constraints create acceptance of paradigms amidst evidence and data. Since natural observations are not fixed and exhibit patterns, paradigms too cannot be tied to a template as they are closely linked to natural observations.

Conclusion

Finally, it is not right to say that paradigms present a choice between theory and practice or a dilemma between theory and practice. They are means to achieve a successful practice based on a sound theoretical foundation. Today's modern world is integrating in terms of communication and bridging distances by technology. At the same time, the world is largely disintegrating in terms of creating multiple solutions and choices at every phase of progress. In such times of uncertainty and flexibility, paradigms come to the rescue of both professionals and scholars by offering theory as an integrator and practice as the fruits of scientific progress resulting out of the successful implementation of theory. In the above example of a glamour stock that has experienced a series of negative earnings shocks; the increased likelihood of a paradigm shift corresponds to elevated conditional volatility as well as to negative conditional skewness (Hong, et al, 2007). As Burke (2007) says, the research which deals primarily with people and information in a world of change, competition, and fluid communications technology should take into account and allow for an understanding of human behaviour. This understanding helps to highlight different contexts, backgrounds, and cultures and therefore provides assistance in making appropriate choices concerning research paradigms and information management, which in turn will ensure thoughtful methodology and justifiable research results. Thus paradigms open up ways to future research which in turn open up several ways to future technologies, products and services thus clearly highlighting the relationship between present research (theories) and future practice.

“We must all hang together or we will assuredly all hang separately.”
—Ben Franklin

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