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Theory Building Research in Asia

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Editorial.....

Management Scholars have been highly attentive to the role of theory. Top Management journals prefer to publish papers which make contribution to theory. Business Scholars have called for new theories of organization (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). According to Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) the research efforts from Theory building perspective can be categorized as follows: Builders (generating new concepts, often through inductive studies), Expanders (new theoretical formulations of existent theories, often derived in a hypothetico-deductive way), Qualifiers (often adding a new mediator or moderator), Testers (novel tests of theory of limited novelty) and Reporters (testing a theory in a different setting).

Current situation of Theory Building Research in Asia

According to Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui, 2015, Management Scholarship has grown tremendously over the last 5 decades and most of the paradigms originated from North America in the 1950's to the 1980's. In contrast, the studies in Asia, typically involved applications of existing western theories rather than development of new theories. This explains the status of theory building in Asia.

However, during 1970s saw several major Asian players emerge internationally. This led to theories like "Theory Z" model of management by Ouchi, 1981 which combines Japanese and American management practices, which challenged the then dominant American Management Model. Also, there were few papers from China that were published in leading management journals that discuss new phenomena like Guanxi by Xin and Pearce (1996), Market Transition Theory by Nee (1992), Network Capitalism by Boisot and Child (1996). It is also observed by Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui, 2015 there is very little new theory or understanding about

management in the Middle east, India, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia or other eastern countries, particularly published in leading management journals.

Opportunity and directions to build new theories in Asian Context

According to National Intelligence councils' global trends report (2012), Asia's economy will be larger than that of the US and European Union combined, by 2030. This shows the rise of Asia in the world economy. This in combination with the differences in Institutions, Philosophies and cultural values between West and East provides a fertile ground for theory building research in Asia.

Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) found that most theories in the management field that had been developed between the 1950's and 1980's coincides with rapid industrialization and growth of American and European economies. Theories were created to explain a variety of perplexing phenomena due to this rapid industrialization in those early years of theory development.

Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui (2015) provides some insights into the future directions of Theory building efforts in Management in Asian context ,which includes communication in Asian organizations, evolution of leadership in Asian organizations, motivation and pattern of outward direct investment from Asia , coordination challenges ,organizational design, business models ,public private partnerships and novel governance structures in Asian context. There is also opportunity to conduct Multidisciplinary research in which management researchers may cooperate with researchers from development and anthropology, potentially leading to new theories, concepts and performance measures.

Presently Asia in particular, world at large is going through a similar phase of rapid Industrialization, referred as 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). Adding to this, Management Domain is experiencing unprecedented changes due to other critical phenomenon digital acceleration, and pandemic COVID-19 leading to transformed products, processes and Business Models. Hence it can be argued that there is greater opportunity to build new concepts, theories and paradigms which provides insights into understanding, explaining and predicting the emerging phenomena around us.

Criteria for evaluating theoretical contributions in Asian context

The Editorial Team (2020) of one of the top research outlet , Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM) , found that, as management theories are mostly originated from observations of

phenomena of Western countries, it is possible that many phenomena in Asian countries may not be fully explained by existing theories. By referring to Ahlstrom, Chen, & Yeh, 2010, they suggest that by observing and conceptualizing some unique phenomena in Asia, we may develop new theories or enrich our existing theories.

Editorial team of APJM (2020) provides three fundamental criteria to evaluate the possible theoretical contributions of phenomenon-based studies for publishing in APJM. This includes (1) authors have to show that the phenomenon is really unique in the Asia context, (2) existing theories are either not applicable or need important modifications in order to explain the phenomenon, and (3) although we should not expect one single study to result in a well-established model or theory in explaining the unique phenomenon, in the long run this may be the result after a series of studies. This provides some guidance for the aspiring researchers who attempt to build theories.

Conclusion

In the present context, there is a greater need and opportunity to build new theories from Asia which can guide the future research and practice of Management. Aspiring theory building researchers need to equip themselves in theory building methodologies and conditions that may have contributed to the rise of new concepts and theories.

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