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## Management – science *in statu nascendi*?

### **Cognitive challenges in management and marketing<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This paper is the first publication from the series of four articles about cognitive challenges in management science. It is the result of the further discussions and reflections concerning the cognitive problems of management after publication of the books about epistemology of management. The question of identity of management perceived like a social science is important mainly to researchers, but also to reflective managers. The paper is a diagnosis of a current cognitive state with main thesis that management is still science *in statu nascendi*. Management belongs to the family of the social sciences and it is still in the primal stage of his evolution. First of all, there is a lack of agreement on the one paradigm or even one way of understanding and classifying the paradigms among scholars. Moreover, in consequence of multi-paradigmatic and multi-disciplinary approach, the poly-methodological perspective must be applied to management sciences. That means, type of the methodological eclectism that is the third characteristic point of management epistemology. At the end of the chapter the case of the multi-paradigmatic, poly-methodological and eclectic is shown in the marketing contemporary discourse.

**Key words:** management epistemology, management methodology, management paradigms.

### Introduction

Epistemology, belonging to the management sciences, is a complex area to be analysed, that is why it is hard to indicate unambiguous research results. I would like to suggest a summary form, which starts from a short analysis of the current situation (diagnosis), then points out the problems that have not been solved (anomaly), and finally indicates possible courses of development for the management sciences (forecast).

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<sup>1</sup> The deeper analysis of the problem in: Ł. Sułkowski, *Epistemology of Management*, Peter Lang International, Frankfurt-Berlin-Bern-Vien-Oxford-New York-London-Warsaw, 2013.

This paper is the first publication from the series of three articles about cognitive challenges in management science. It is the result of the further discussions and reflections concerning the cognitive problems of management after publication of the books about epistemology of management. The question of identity of management perceived like a social science is important mainly to researchers, but also to reflective managers. The paper is a diagnosis of a current cognitive state with main thesis that management is still science *in statu nascendi*.

### ***In statu nascendi***

*In statu nascendi* means that management sciences are still at the beginning of development. While diagnosing the current condition of management sciences, one can notice here manifestations of science that are established socially, institutionally, and at the same time *in statu nascendi* in epistemological and methodological sense. First of all, there are no common agreement on one paradigm in management or even how to classify different types of paradigms [Sulkowski 2012, pp. 106–112].

Management sciences are a characteristic convention in the researchers environment, in which research issues formed specific problems of epistemological, methodological and institutional nature. The identity of the management sciences researchers, though blurred and culturally relative, is focused on organizing process, which can be perceived ambiguously. It is possible to indicate that management sciences have their own characteristic, interdisciplinary research area, insight, and research methodology. This area is partly shared with research fields of other sciences, nevertheless some specific features can be pointed out, which are reflected in the science's ethos, epidemic ideals, and paradigms.

The identity of management sciences has been the subject of intensive research all over the world as well as in Poland for the last two decades [Johnson, Duberley 2005]. They assume the character of reflection on paradigms, methodology and development of science and its relation with the practice of management [Burrell, Morgan 1979; Remenyi, Williams, Money, Swartz 2005]. It is difficult to point out clear conclusions drawn from these analyses. Some researchers believe that for the development of management sciences it is necessary to precisely determine the field of research, insight and methods that will enable the demarcation between management sciences and other scientific disciplines [Sudoł 2014]. Other researchers take the position that allows the ambiguity of the concept of management and the ability

to overlap the object and methods of study with other disciplines [Sulkowski 2007]. The problem of scientific disciplines separation is associated primarily with complex relations with such disciplines, separated in Poland, as economy, finances, as well as sociology, psychology, law, cultural anthropology and many others. This may lead to the conclusion that management sciences are at an early stage of development or that they are at permanently birth stage (*in statu nascendi*).

### Multi-paradigmatism in management

The key challenge of management science is the question of multi-paradigmatism and, in consequence, poly-methodology. According to numerous researchers, management has not developed its own, characteristic research methodology, but uses one from many other disciplines. Naturally, this does not undermine the scientific status of our discipline, as the study subject, i.e. 'organisation', may be examined with the use of scientific methods that were created by other social sciences, or other empirical sciences. In the case of management, we deal with a multiplicity of methods related mostly to different scientific paradigms and schools, as well as internal diversity of management sub-disciplines. Referring to the distinction made by G. Burrell and G. Morgan, we can point to the diversity of methods resulting from the multiplicity of organisation and management paradigms [Burrell, Morgan 1979]. The dominant current of management refers to an ideal of neo-positivist methods of quantitative and representative character, including statistical and survey methods, as well as para-experiments and simulations [Sulkowski 2004]. Alternative paradigms, such as the interpretative and symbolic or critical current, refer to the qualitative methodology, which focuses on exploratory aspects. Interpretivists prefer methods drawn from cultural anthropology and humanist sociology, i.e. organisation ethnology, in-depth interviews and discourse analyses [Alvesson, Willmott 2003, Howcroft, Trauth 2005]. The representatives of the critical current prefer emancipation and involved methods, leading to changes of unjust social and organisational order, based on the distribution of power, such as empowerment, critical text analyses and other methods of the denaturalisation of management discourse [Parker 2002]. Among the representatives of management science there are many authors who point to the need for combining methods drawn from different paradigms [Hatch, Schultz 1996].

The methodology of management sciences undergoes development and enrichment [Koontz, O'Donnell 1972, pp. 25–26]. It becomes more and

more pluralistic, and it draws inspiration and adopts methods and techniques from many other scientific fields. The main research trend in Poland, related to the preparation of works connected to obtaining a degree, continuously suffers from survey mania and "quantityphreny", which result from the pursuit of methodological purism rooted in neo-positivism (a specific *scientific correctness* through analogy to *political correctness*). At the same time, we can observe the rising number of research projects and scientific works that are based on methodological pluralism and combine methods taken from different paradigms and views. Another, no less significant division of research methods is the division into sub-disciplines. The methodologies of marketing, human resources management, quality management and managerial accounting differ mainly in the way they perceive aims, and in terms of research techniques and tools. This means that a methodological division, based on both paradigms and sub-disciplines, often results in a disproportion, or even contradiction between different research results. If such cognitive tension leads to research triangulation [Denzin 2006], then the polymethodology is of value, but when it is impossible to harmonise the results of research on an organisation based on different research perspectives, then it becomes a problem. The solution might be a kind of 'methodological eclecticism', condemning us to the application of the multiplicity of methods or attempts to bridge a gap between different perspectives (a meta-paradigmatic approach).

### **Eclectic nature of management**

The management sciences identity is of a blurred, eclectic nature, combining incommensurate paradigms, and an array of anomalies, such as: theory versus practice, economy versus the humanities, basic research versus applied sciences [Dalton, Chrobot-Mason 2007, pp. 169–183]. Nevertheless, it appears here that identity reinforcement should be founded on epistemological and methodological reflection. The ambitious task of epistemological reflection continued to this day and has been undertaken by the praxeologists. The task has uncovered many problems stemming from reflection on cognitive foundations. First of all, it turned out to be impossible to unambiguously indicate logical and unquestionable cognitive foundations of the management sciences. This ambition, traced back to neo-positivism, has been inherited by the praxeologists. Second of all, praxeology copes with the problem of "meta-discourse sterility" – problem which also hits the system concept and other management theory trends. Explanations found on the

highest level of scientific analyses (“meta-discourse”) become a kind of philosophy and a way of thinking, which cannot be verified or falsified in any way. With time, they undergo petrification and ideologization, which make the reflections more and more hermetic and sterile. Third of all, praxeology has not coped with the challenges of cultural relativism, taking instead the view of scientific discourse versatility. Fourth of all, Polish praxeology experienced a very intense development in the times of centrally-planned economy, which took its toll on this discipline in the form of calls for determinism and instrumentalism. This is a simplifying assumption that encompasses full control over the actions of social actors and the effectiveness of deterministic planning, which can point to parallels with utopian projects of “social engineering”. Among Polish praxeologists today one can also notice development of management concept as a reflective and critical discipline.

Management as a discipline has rejected “methodological fundamentalism”, which defined “scientific nature” of a method in a restrictive way by referring to neopositivist models of natural sciences. Works of the contemporary management emphasize the necessity of using many cognitive and organization shaping methods. N. Denzin, formulating postulate referring to methodological triangulation, points to the necessity of using many mutually correcting and verifying methods [Denzin 1970]. “Methodological pluralism” assumes willingness to use methods taken from various disciplines and theoretical approaches for solving a research problem – “the multiple ways of seeing the world are accompanied by multiple and various ways, methods, techniques of research and attempts at transforming the world” [Krzyzanowski 1999, p. 280]. “Methodological anarchy” goes even further and suggests lack of devotion to any method and equal using of all methods and techniques taken both from science, and from colloquial life [Feyerabend 1996]. I think that the approach, which I would call “methodological eclecticism”, and which can be compared with other approaches to methodology (Table 1), is worth considering.

**Table 1. Comparison of fundamentalism, pluralism, eclecticism, and methodological anarchy**

<b>Comparison criterion</b>	<b>Methodological fundamentalism</b>	<b>Methodological pluralism</b>	<b>Methodological eclecticism</b>	<b>Methodological anarchy</b>
<b>Necessity of using methods within science</b>	One “scientific method” is needed. Cognitive techniques are diversified.	Many “scientific methods and techniques” are necessary, depending on discipline.	Many “scientific methods and techniques” are needed within one discipline.	Complete lack of scientific methods – “ <i>anything goes</i> ”.
<b>The possibility of combining methods</b>	Different scientific methods cannot be combined.	Methods taken from various paradigms and approaches can be combined.	Methods taken from various disciplines, paradigms and approaches can be combined.	Methods taken from science and colloquial life can be combined.
<b>Development of methods within science</b>	There is only one “scientific method” that emerges as knowledge, pertaining to a given discipline, is accumulated.	There are many scientific methods, which emerge as the discipline develops.	There are many scientific methods, which can be contradictory. The matter of their convergence is not solved.	There is no scientific method, and science does not undergo development.
<b>Assessment of method's effectiveness</b>	Scientific verification or falsification.	Cognitive effectiveness.	Cognitive and paradigmatic effectiveness.	Practical (paradigmatic) efficacy.

Source: own work.

## Eclectic perspective in contemporary marketing

Marketing is the core of instrumental discourse of management sciences. Undoubtedly the dominating image of marketing management suggests a rational image of an economic entity operating on the market, aiming to achieve success by systematic recognition and planned development and satisfaction of the needs of potential customers. However, relativist ideas of postmodernism and eclecticism match contemporary theory and practice of marketing as well.

Postmodernism is a wide and ambiguous intellectual formation promoting anti-systematic, anti-methodological and eclectic view on social life. The interest in postmodern inspirations in management sciences was until the 80's of the 20th century when the constructivist understanding of organizations developed. Regardless of the program ambiguity a few features of postmodernism can be distinguished which will be referred to marketing [Venkatesh 2009].

1. Research theories and methodologies developed by marketing are pragmatic and local in their nature, and are not a reflection of universal regulations. Actually, it could be said following A. Venkatesh that marketing has always been postmodern, but was not aware of it [Venkatesh 2009]. Consumer, brand, organization identity, marketing orientation, corporate image, and even marketing strategy are not objective categories, but constructed as a social consensus, ordering and changing our world. They are formed on the basis of cultural solutions, are collective entities, and thus they combine historically established values and interests of various parties.
2. According to the assumptions of postmodernism, marketing, and science in general, is an activity based on values, in which the truth turns into a narrative [Venkatesh 2009]. Organization, company and market are conventional and ambiguous categories, interpreted in many ways, which should be considered as Wittgenstein's 'language games'.
3. According to the definition by C. Geertz people are involved in the network of meanings of their own creation [Geertz 1973]. A. Venkatesh indicates that today we are dealing with the 'economy of signs', which takes a post-material form. Consumers buy brands and meanings which they read subjectively using cultural interpretations [Venkatesh 2009]. Marketing communication takes place primarily in the symbolic world. The dominance of services in economy and the increasing role of brand and fashion are just some of the manifestations of the functioning of marketing as symbolic communication. Marketing becomes the system of production of socially promoted symbolic meanings associated with the consumption.
4. Subjectivism and particularism in marketing mean the adoption of the assumptions of a full, cultural flexibility of the consumer. The consumer is a kind of 'cultural plasticine', which is formed in the communication process. Marketing communication is therefore able to stimulate fashions in every sphere of society. It is possible to have a fashion for music, food, clothes, and even politicians.

5. Brand and symbolic meanings created by marketing as understood by CMS, are gaining aspects of symbolic violence [Bourdieu 1987]. They impose 'communication scripts' and stereotypes on cultures and their participants. Ready ways of understanding social reality which allow to avoid reflective and open to diversity attitudes. However, postmodern marketing does not assume that the creators of marketing communication act as a demiurges. They can influence the directions of discourse development but they cannot fully control it. Inside the culture, certain motives can be adopted, while others do not gain in importance. The creators of marketing communication promoting certain fashions try to put forward patterns to the recipients and observe to what extent they have been picked up. Naturally, it is known in advance that due to the ephemeral character of the consumer, they will not be permanent.

6. Postmodernism rejects the corresponding concept of truth. We deal with the multiplicity of realities and their subjective interpretation. J. Baudrillard uses the term 'simulacrum' to describe the process of constructing the world named by man [Baudrillard 1994]. Contemporary research on media, mass communication and cyberspace are close to the postmodern idea of hyper-reality. D. Peppers and M. Rogers talk about marketing paradigm shift accompanying the development of the Internet, which indicates the transition from one channel to multi-channel communication and personalized interactive communication [Peppers, Rogers 1993]. Cyberspace is described with the use of metaphors comparing it to the physical space, to books, to movies. However, it is qualitatively different from previously known to us everyday reality. In cyberspace, the identity of wanderers, who remain submerged in the boundless simulation existing in their minds and in the process of communication, is being erased.

7. Taylorism and Fordism grew out of the spirit of positivism and industrialization. Scientific organization of work was manifested in the necessity for deterministic division of labor into elementary sequences undergoing rigorous control by the management. Marketing at its inception alluded to these assumptions. It was supposed to propose models of sales, communication, distribution and pricing activities of the company operating in the conditions of mass production of goods. The basic idea of the circle of marketing strategy, marketing research and marketing-mix was based on deterministic assumptions. The new orientation in management sciences also carries significant implications for marketing management. According to some researchers, organizations of the future will be multicultural and pluralistic, net-based, decentralized and heterarchic, based on symbolic goods [Engholm

2001]. Organizations active in the information society will be based on self-steering, flexible worker teams. Marketing activities should become the subject of interest to most employees, not only specialized sections. To this end, multi-skilled employees are required who can quickly adapt to changing market demands. Multicultural marketing must account for the fundamental importance of cultural and language differences, creating multi-dimensional net-based and interactive relationships with the customers. Thus, the development of methods of partnership and relationship marketing, which will be adapted to the local cultural context, seems likely. The assumption of social constructionism and the importance of symbolic goods leads marketing people to focus on creating and promoting meanings which have a chance to enter the cultural discourse.

8. Power is one of the key themes of the CMS and postmodernism. M. Foucault believed that power is always associated with knowledge, because while ruling we create the truth. It is not possible to exercise power in a different way, other than through the production of truth [Foucault 2000]. With regard to marketing, one can point to the issue of ethical problems of this discipline. Creating symbolic meanings and goods such as brands is a kind of 'symbolic violence' practiced by corporations. With the influence of communication channels it is possible to manipulate with meanings for the implementation of economic and political interests. Postmodern marketing assumes ethical sensitivity to sophisticated forms of marketing manipulation and exposes the manipulation of social engineering and psychomanipulation approach of modernist marketing.

An attempt to present a post modern perspective in marketing indicated the purposefulness of seeking such inspirations. Eclectic, postmodern approach to marketing confirms that it is a multi-paradigmatic discipline, currently *in statu nascendi*.

## Conclusion

Management belongs to the family of the social sciences and is still in the primal stage of his evolution. First of all, there is no agreement on the one paradigm or even one way of understand and classify the paradigms among scholars. Moreover, in consequence of multi-paradigmatic and multi-disciplinary approach, the poly-methodological perspective must be applied to management sciences. That means, type of the methodological eclecticism that is the third characteristic point of management epistemology. The good

reflection of these cognitive traits in management we could find in marketing discourse.

Having reached the diagnosis that in modern management sciences we have to deal with ambiguity in the area of the object of study and methodology, there remains an answer to a more difficult question of whether it is permanent ‘immaturity’ of management sciences, or it just a stage in development, which leads to more developed stages. The current multiplicity of theories, methods, paradigms and scientific schools called ‘management theory jungle’ does not indicate a perspective of quick integration. This could indicate that management sciences are ‘permanently immature’ and therefore *in statu nascendi*. However, it does not seem that there are conclusive arguments allowing to unambiguously declare this stage of *in statu nascendi* of management sciences as final. There may appear and develop a paradigm which will meet the integration role in the future. An example of attempts to search for such a new, universal paradigm for management sciences, and perhaps even for social sciences in general, may be a reflection on neoevolutionism [Sulkowski 2009].

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