Challenges of Social Science Research in Management

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Chennai, December 29, 2014
Science

• Traditionally, science had been confined to natural phenomena involving inanimate (non-sentient) objects
• Examples: physics, chemistry, and most biology
• Discovering laws that govern the behavior of a pen, chair, or electric bulb
• Universality of these laws in time and space, and their high predictive content, earned enormous prestige for natural sciences and scientists
Adding *Social* to Science

• Over time, attempts have been made to discover laws that govern human behavior at individual and social levels

• To the extent our discoveries about human social behavior have universality and predictive power, social sciences may also earn the claim to be a science, and some of that prestige

• But extending the enterprise of discovering laws of behavior to sentient beings (us) presents major challenges for several reasons
Challenges for Social Science

• As sentient beings we are endowed with faculties of awareness, learning, recoverable and managed memory, and willful reaction to scientific and experimental treatments

• Consequently, social phenomena tend to be transient
  – At what level can (or should) we seek to identify the laws of social sciences? At a moment in time; rate of variation; or second derivatives, and so on.

• How robust are the laws of social science to their own discovery?
  – Do discoveries in social sciences induce changes in behavior that tend to invalidate them?

• Ethical dimensions of manipulative controls and treatments when we apply the standard methods of science to social phenomena
  – We often refrain from experimental approaches for this reason

• Establishing causation (effect, impact, consequence, etc.)
  – From field data: selection, spurious correlation, common cause problems
  – Experimental data: external validity, experimenter as a player
Management Research

• Mostly social sciences (except technical fields such as operations management)
• It has proved to be exceptionally difficulty to discover better methods of managing: very few claims are new, valid, and useful
• What can we do to improve efficiency of management?
• Whose purposes do the researchers serve?
Thank You.

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