

Research Critique

Name

Instructor

Institution

Location

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1 Introduction

As pointed out by Saunders et al (2007), whenever a researcher is carrying out a research, there is a need for the researcher to review the various research methods that could be used in the given research prior to the researcher coming to a conclusion on the specific research method that will be used in the study been carried out. Among others, some of the factors that Creswell (2006) has pointed out to have a major impact on the research method that is used by the researcher whenever a research is been carried out includes; the researcher's experience, nature of the research topic that is been carried out and the availability of the various resources that would be required by the researcher to undertake the research. In that perspective, it can therefore be explained that before a researcher settles on a specific research method, there is a need that the research considers various factors as that will ensure that the researcher ends up using the research method that is ideal. This paper presents an analysis of the research method that was used by Ralston et al. (1999) in conducting a research that was titled, *Doing business in the 21st century with the new generation of Chinese managers: A study of generational shifts in work values in China.*

2 Hypotheses and their theoretical and practical relevance

As the title of the study suggests, the study focused on China with the main focus been on how the country has experienced generational shifts in work values. In pursuit of the aim and objectives of the study, the scholars developed three hypothesis that were:

- H1: For the Individualism dimension, the mean score of the New Generation subjects will be significantly higher than the scores of the Current Generation and the Older Generation subjects.
- H2: For the Collectivism dimension, the mean score of the New Generation subjects will be significantly lower than the scores of the Current Generation and the Older Generation subjects.

- H3: For the Confucian dimension, the mean score of the New Generation subjects will be significantly lower than the score of the Current Generations and the Older Generation subjects.

Considering that we are in the 21st Century and that China is playing a major role in the world economics as well as production, it can be pointed out that the study carried out by the scholars as well as the hypothesis advanced by the scholars were relevant since majority of companies located in Western countries have been moving their production to China due to the fact that China has very low costs of productions. In addition, the fact that China also has a very large market that some Western companies consider to have very high potential implies that the study by Ralston et al. (1999) was very relevant and indeed was carried out at the right time since the findings of the research can be said to be of great use to any foreign company that is either currently in China or intends to invest in China as the study would enhance the effectiveness of the company in China.

Indeed, even though the research was carried out during the year 1999, it can be explained that the findings of this study are still very much relevant and of great use to companies that have operations in China or intend to have operations in China. In that perspective, it can therefore be stated that the research by Ralston et al. (1999) was justified.

3 Epistemological and ontological assumptions which underpinned the research, and their consistency with research hypotheses

In the study by Ralston et al. (1999), it can be pointed out that there is sufficient evidence to show that both epistemological as well as ontological assumptions were present in the study.

Nevertheless, prior to expounding on that, there is a need to first explain what epistemological

and ontological assumptions entails. According to Crotty (2003), ontological assumptions focuses on the type of the type of world that is been researched on, with the nature of existence, as well as the structures of reality. On the other hand, as far as epistemological assumption is concerned, Crotty (2003) explained that it involves " a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (p.3).

Now that epistemological and ontological assumptions have been defined, it is vital to explain how they have been used in the study. As far as the ontology that is used in the study is concerned, it can be explained that the ontology used is realistic ontology since by reading the article by the scholars, it is evident that the scholars followed the physical world in which they assumed the presence of a world of cause and effect hence the reason they allege that there has been a generation shifts in work values in China. On the other hand, as far as the epistemological assumption is concerned, the epistemological assumption that is used in the research is constructionism. Indeed, according to Crotty (2003), constructionism postulates that the perspective of that all knowledge and thus all meaningful reality as such is based on human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction among human beings and their world.

As far as the consistency of the assumptions in the research are concerned, it can be pointed out that the assumptions are very much consistent throughout the entire research since the scholar can be said to not have changed the assumptions.

4 The research design and its strengths and limitations for answering the research hypotheses

Research design as explained by Patton (2002) explains the manner in which a study is carried out. In addition according to Patton (2002), descriptive, correlational, semi-experimental, experimental, review and meta-analytic are the most common types of research designs that are used by most researchers.

As far as the study by Ralston et al. (1999) is concerned, it can be explained that the research design that was used in the study was a descriptive research design with a case control study approach been used. As explained by Adèr, Mellenbergh, and Hand (2008), entails an observational study through which various existing groups differing in outcome are identified and compared on the basis of some supposed causal attribute. Indeed, in this study, the shifts from new, current and older generation have been considered hence the reason the researchers can be said to have used a descriptive research design.

As far as the advantages of the research design that was used by the researchers are concerned, it can be explained that one of the advantages was that the design made it possible for the researchers to single out the different aspects of each of the generation group that the study focused on resulting to the aim and objectives of the study been achieved. In addition to that, it can also be explained that the research design that was used by Ralston et al. (1999) made it easy for the scholars to achieve the objectives as it is usually cheaper as less resources were required.

On the other hand, as far as the disadvantages of the research design that was used by the scholars are concerned, it can be pointed that the design can be said to have been prone to error thus raising questions pertaining to the reliability and validity of the findings of the research. For instance, when the scholars were developing the questionnaire, the questions were obviously predetermined and prescriptive. In addition to that, it can also be noted that it can also be pointed out that there is also the likelihood of the researchers been biased either during the data collection process or during the data analysis process.

Nevertheless, considering the nature of the research as well as the number of the research subjects that were used in the study, it can be explained that the descriptive research design that was used by the scholars was the ideal research design for that specific study since if the researchers had opted to use other alternative designs, there is a chance that the aim and objectives of the research might not have been achieved.

5 The sampling strategy that was used to select the sources of data and an appraisal of the rationale for why particular sources/respondents were selected

The fact that the research focused on new generation of managers in China meant that the researchers had to collect data from respondents who qualified to be referred to as new generation managers. Nevertheless, it can be noted that it would not have been practically possible for the researchers to collect data from every individual who qualified to be considered as a new generation manager. In that perspective, there was thus a need for the researchers to use an ideal sampling approach that would ensure that the research subjects who were selected were a good representation of the entire research population.

In the articles, the only thing that the scholars have explained regarding the sampling strategy was that only 865 individuals who were no more than 40 years and worked in state-run organizations were used in the study. From that perspective, it can be noted that there was a need for the researchers to explain more about the sampling strategy. Indeed, it is obvious that the research population had more than 865 individuals and it would thus have been better if the scholars explained the specific criteria that was used to single out the 865 individuals that were used in the research. In addition to that, it would have also been more ideal if the scholars also considered using individuals who were also working in private organizations as it is obvious that the strategies used in government run organizations are totally different with the strategies that are used in private organization.

As far as the reasons as to why the participants under the age of 40 were used, it can be pointed out that the main reason for that was due to the fact that the study focused on new generation of Chinese managers whom the researchers considered to be less than 40 years of age. As far as the sample size of 865 is concerned, it can be explained that this sample size was ideal since it ensure that data was collected from a large sample size even though as has already been pointed out, the extent to which the findings of that study can be generalized to the entire research population is questionable.

Nevertheless, on a different perspective, it can also be pointed out that the researchers did not really expound on the ethical issues and how they were addressed since in the article the only aspect of ethical issue that the researcher pointed out was the issue of privacy while there was also other aspects that should have been discussed.

6 Research method that was used to generate the data and the strengths and weaknesses

Even though the researchers have not specifically stated the research method they used in the data collection process, it can be pointed out that from the review of the research approaches and techniques that were used in the study, it is clear that the researcher used quantitative research method as the research method that was used has many of the features that Saunders et al. (2009) has discussed to be the main features of a quantitative research method.

One of the strengths of the method that was used by the researchers is that it facilitated easier collection of research data from a large sample size as can be proved by the fact that 865 individuals working in China were involved in the study. In addition to that, the data that was collected was easily analysed through the use of statistical tools thus making it easy for the researcher to test the hypothesis that were found to be valid. Apart from that, it can also be pointed out that the research method can be explained to have a higher credibility as there was little chance for the researchers to manipulate the data that was collected.

On the other hand, it can also be explained that the research method that was used had some weaknesses. Indeed, one of the weaknesses can be said to emanate from the fact that the data that was collected during the research process can be considered to have been descriptive in nature since even if it gave proof that there is generation shift in China, the reasons as to why the shift was in place was never established. On the other hand, the fact that the researchers mainly focused on testing the three hypothesis that they had advanced implied that there was no room for the researchers to investigate new developments that they might have come across when conducting the research as is the case with qualitative research method. Finally, another

weakness of the quantitative research method as pointed out by Patton (2002) is that the responses that are given by the respondents are usually limited implying that the data that was collected might even be said to have been limited to some extent.

7 Analytical strategy used to analyze the data and the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy

The fact that the research data that was collected by the researchers from the quantitative research that they carried out was quantitative data implied that the analytical strategy that was to be used to analyze that specific data had to also be a quantitative strategy. On the other hand, Saunders et al. (2009) has explained that the fact that quantitative data tends to be ordered makes it easier for researchers analyzing quantitative data to use statistical data analysis tool.

In case of the article by Ralston et al. (1999), it can be explained that the researchers used SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) as this statistical tools offered the researchers the opportunity to establish the correlations between the various variables that were researched on. In particular, it can be explained that the use of SPSS made it possible for the scholars to carry out a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) which has been explained by Warne (2004) as a procedure for comparing multivariate sample means of a number of groups. In that perspective, it can be explained that as a multivariate procedure, it made it possible for the researchers to use two or more dependent variables.

One of the main strengths of the use of SPSS can be said to be the fact that it made it possible and easier for the researchers to analyse the large data set that they had from the research that

they had carried out. Apart from that, it can also be noted that the use of SPSS also made it possible for the researchers to undertake different types of analysis that they might not have been able to carry out if they had used different statistical tool since SPSS is widely regarded as been among the most advanced statistical data analysis tools.

On the other hand, as far as the disadvantages of SPSS as concerned, it can be explained that one of the disadvantage is that in case the researchers did make a mistake when inputting the data, then the SPSS might not have detected it and that could have had impacts on the entire research.

In addition, the fact that the data was analysed through the use of a tool implies that the researchers' role was only to input the data in the analysis tool resulting to the researcher not been 'directly' involved in the actual data analysis process like is the case with qualitative data analysis process.

8 Contribution of research to existing knowledge of the topic and to policy and practice.

As has already been pointed out, the findings of this specific research were going to be important as the study focused on an issue that is of significance to many organizations that either have presence in China or intends to establish presence in China.

As far as the contribution of the research to existing knowledge of the topic and to policy and practice is concerned, it can be pointed out that the findings of the research are going to have an impact to the way foreign businesses in China are run. Indeed, the fact that managers in China are now more individualistic and are risk takers implies that organizations that wants to succeed in China have to hire manager who have such characters.

As far as the contribution of the findings of the research to existing literature is concerned, it can be explained that the findings of the study seems to support the convergence theory as the practices and policies that are pursued by what the scholars refer to as new generation of Chinese managers can be said to have aspects of converging model.

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