

Challenging Managerialism

Reflexivity and Research Training: Lessons from the DBA

Dr Murray Clark
Sheffield Hallam University
&
Dr Janet Kirkham
University of Hertfordshire

Our Purpose



- n To stimulate discussion on the role of management research training in developing critical professional practice
- n To put forward a case for developing a capacity for more critical reflection in programme participants, and in particular a focus on epistemic, over and above methodological reflexivity
- n How to teach research to develop researching practitioners rather than practicing researchers

Introduction



- n Contention: We unwittingly allow the managerialist paradigm to influence design of management research training programmes
- n The influence of managerialism on management programmes through Employer & Government agendas
- n Academic community's concern to legitimize DBA by equating it to PhD – does it lead to an uncritical questioning of widely accepted managerialist agendas

Survey of DBA Programmes

- n Need to address issues of research content, research process and research dissemination (*Starkey & Madan, 2001*)
- n DBA programmes aim to help managers become better reflective practitioners
- n Rationales for DBA – Business Schools to address relevance of management research to practice of management
- n DBAs portrayed as researching practitioners, rather than practicing researchers
- n Management practitioners should question their intuitive understandings and engage in reflective conversations with their situation, turning thought and practice back on action and the knowing that is implicit in action. (*Schön, 1983*).



Challenges: What is Management Research?

The reflective turn

- n Epistemological concerns
 - u What we are researching and to what end
- n Mode 2 knowledge production systems
 - u *'a constant flow back and forth between... the theoretical and the practical ... discovery occurs in contexts where knowledge is developed for, and put to use, while results which would have been traditionally characterized as applied – fuel further theoretical advances'*. (Gibbons et al., 1994, p.9)
- n Managers need to be more interested in the concepts that can help them make sense of and deal with dilemmas of management
- n Epistemological concerns and manner in which research methods should be designed and taught should be top of the agenda

Challenges: the gaps

- n The relevance gap in management research (Starkey & Madan 2001)
 - u Need to creatively address issues of research content, process and dissemination
 - u Develop forms of knowledge that help managers become better reflective practitioners

- n The existence of a gap between espoused aims of programmes and the actual

- n Challenge for DBA tutors & students is to learn multi-perspective practices and be open to possibilities of multi-voicing practices (*Alvesson et al., 2008*)

Challenges: Researching Practitioners

Researchers must confront and question the taken for granted assumptions which traditionally inform our knowledge claims

- n *Management practitioners should question their intuitive understandings and engage in reflective conversations with their situation, turning thought and practice back on action and the knowing that is implicit in action.* (Schön,1983).
- n *Management researchers should be concerned to develop new modes of engagement that allow subjects to pursue interests and objectives which are currently excluded by the dominant management discourses”* (Johnson & Duberley, 2003 p.1291)



Epistemic Reflexivity

- n The role of research methods training in DBA:
to facilitate the researcher's ability to comprehend their issues and problems and to see their position and context in new ways from the perspective of epistemic reflexivity
- n Researchers must confront and question the taken for granted assumptions which traditionally inform our knowledge claims
- n *“What in management research is important for management practice? Primary usefulness of management research lies in the development of fundamental ideas that might shape managerial thinking, not in the solution of immediate managerial problems” (March, 2000)*

Middle range Theories

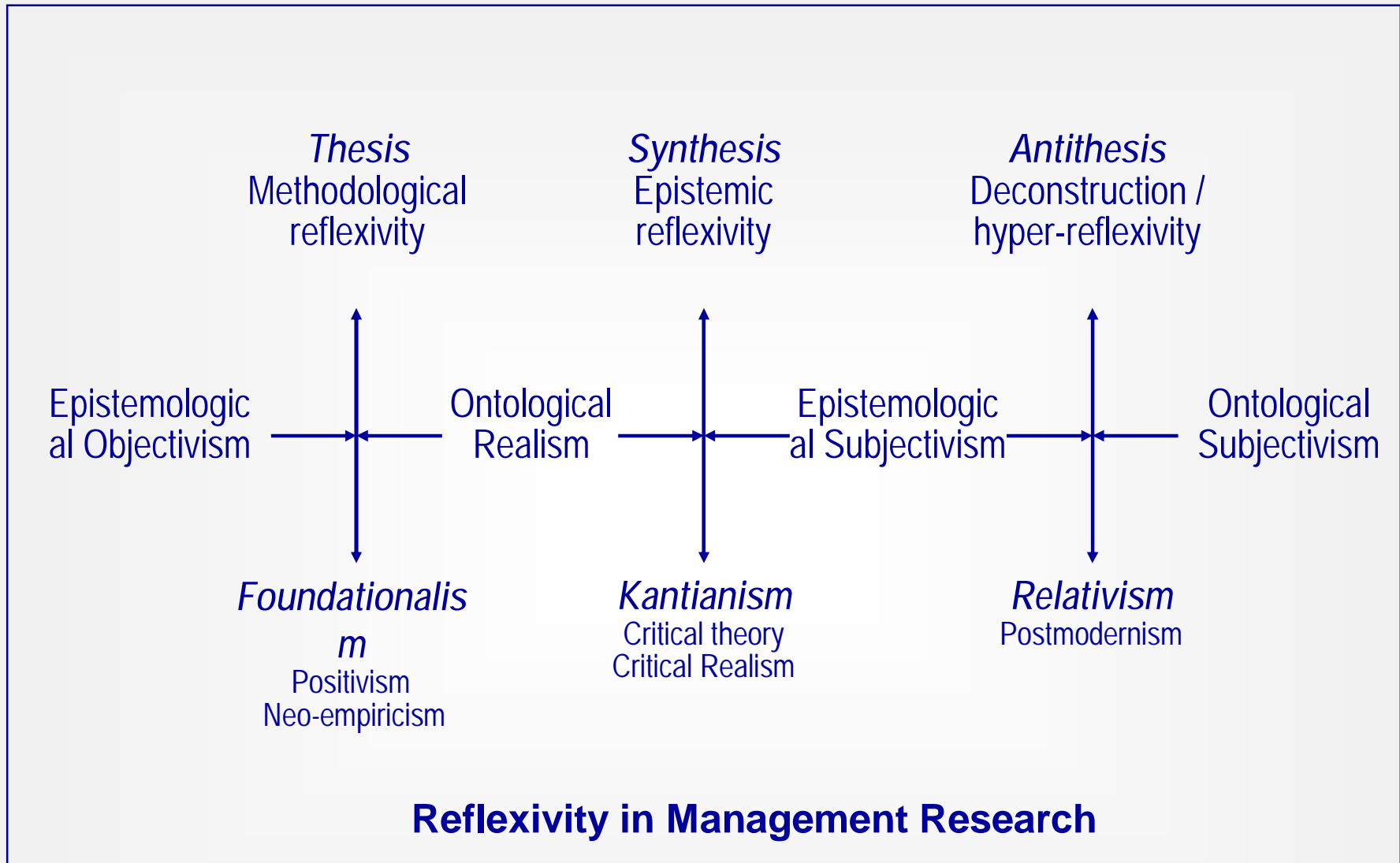
- n *Search for grand theory or all encompassing narrative vs. small scale specific context focused explanations*
- n *The purpose of DBA research seen as a middle range theoretical approach, focusing attention on issues that stand a reasonable chance of being illuminated by empirical study.*
- n **DBA students**
 - researching practitioners (reflecting on management experience and practice in order to inform management theory/design), as opposed to
 - practicing researchers (producing theory based on academic expertise to inform management practice).



Reflexivity

(Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000)

- n Reflection – interpreting one’s own interpretations, looking at one’s own perspectives from other perspectives and turning a self-critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author
- n Reflexivity – draws attention to the complex processes of knowledge production and the contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer.
- n It directs attention inwards towards the person of the researcher, the research community and the intellectual and cultural traditions of society
- n The launching of critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material



Reflexivity & Management Research

Forms of reflexivity

- n Methodological reflexivity – improving methods and their application
- n Hyper reflexivity – a self referential outcome of discursive practices
- n ***Epistemic reflexivity*** – attempts made to relate research outcomes to knowledge constraining and knowledge constituting impact of the researcher's own beliefs which derive from their socio-historical location
 - u Examine how they are part of their own data and question taken for granted assumptions which traditionally inform knowledge claims and practice

Source: Johnson, P. & Duberley, J. (2003)



Research

- n **Concern** - a need to develop discussion about the possibility of reflexivity in management research
- n **Aim** – examine research methods training on UK DBA programmes
- n **Explore** - the potential for research methodology teaching to facilitate the development of deeper levels of personal development, and the enhancement of professional practice
- n **Method**
 1. A survey of DBA programme web-pages to examine espoused philosophies of research and learning
 2. More detailed exploration of practice – six mini-case studies, interviews, observation and documents.



Conclusions from survey

- n Surveyed 21 programmes & most mentioned equivalence to PhD,
- n All have a “taught” programme of supportive studies as part of programme, but this mainly focuses on Research methods – only four mention wider complementary studies in management (of which ours are two). Very few mention critical management studies which we consider essential for developing reflexive capacity
- n Most assess research methods training directly – only six don’t seem to (of which ours are two again)
- n Only four give credits (at M or D level) – others don’t
- n Majority of programmes (nearly 60%) are 4 years part – time. Only five have F/T version. Majority seem to do block but it’s not always clear whether these are weeks or weekends

Case 1

The programme aims to:

- n *produce work that represents an original contribution to the practice of management and knowledge,*
- n *provide training in the design, execution & analysis of research*
- n *improve participants' effectiveness as professional practitioners*
- n *build a rich community of reflective practitioners*

Twin strands of professional development and research training offered by the programme are designed to provide mutual enhancement of theory and praxis in the learning experience.

Participants are required to submit: A research proposal & a reflexive account of their own management development and practice



Case 2

The programme philosophy:

- n Focus on methodological understanding & theory informed critical enquiry that enables practice derived insight
- n Seek to increase academic knowledge and to inform and impact on practice, professional competence and decision-making.

Key features

- n close cooperation between business and university interfaces
- n workshops on methodology and theoretical knowledge help support student learning
- n research modules facilitate enhanced theoretical understanding and application to practice through encouraging critical engagement
- n focus on embracing academic achievement and practice based professional development as critical elements

Case 3

The programme aims for participants to:

- n critically appraise their own insights and impact as a manager
- n continue to build on learning through their capacity as a reflective practitioner

Key features

- n learning and sharing of experience to be gained by participants as one of a group moving through the programme together.
- n learning sets contribute by offering a forum for discussion, sharing experiences and reflection on research ideas,
- n students use the learning from the research modules to critique the basic ideas that shape the discourse about management practice & theory.
- n discussion focuses on the primary usefulness of management research as lying in the development of ideas that might shape managerial thinking

Cases - summary

- n Research methodology training is the key component of programmes, not so different to PhDs
- n Programmes often rely, in accordance with a managerialist position, on demonstrating the quality of graduates by their methodological reflexivity
- n Often professional development is interpreted as development as a researcher, not the wider researching professional.
- n Wider and deeper professional development of programme participants *as managers* is key issue, yet infrequent opportunities for this observed
- n The contribution of the DBA is to challenge organization processes by questioning the basic assumptions of management practice
- n There is, as *Cunliffe & Jun (2005) state*, a need to question our natural and taken for granted attitudes such as our prejudice, bias, thought and habits – the central thread of reflexivity
- n Focus needed on how to ‘teach’ practitioners and teachers to understand in more depth different ways in which reflexivity may be achieved.

DBA: Critical Research conclusions

- n The critical (DBA) researcher engages in critique and reflection of the established order of things and challenges rather than confirms that which is established through conventional methods
- n Interpretations and theoretical assumptions of the researcher are not neutral but are part of and help to construct perceptions of reality
- n Critical reflection, concerning issues of a researcher's assumptions, interpretations and interactions are essential for practical outcomes
- n Reflexivity is an essential part of the research process
- n Management education has an important role in developing an intimate understanding of the way in which management knowledge is acquired, organized and developed (theory)
- n Our view that manner in which management research methods should be designed and executed should now be back at top of agenda



References

- n Alvesson, M & Skoldberg, K. (2000) *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*: London: sage
- n Alvesson, M, Hardy, C. & Harley, B. (2008) Reflecting on reflexivity: Reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory, *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(3), 480-501
- n Cunliffe, A.L. & Jun, J.S. (2005) The need or reflexivity in public administration. *Administration & Society*, 37, 225-242
- n Gibbons M, Limoges L, Nowotny H, Schwartzman S, Scott P and Trow M (1994) *The new production of knowledge, the dynamics of science and researching contemporary societies*. Sage
- n Johnson P and Duberley J (2003) Reflexivity in Management Research *Journal of Management Studies* 40 (5) 1279-1303
- n Schön, D.A. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books
- n Starkey K and Madan P (2001) Bridging the relevance gap: aligning stakeholders in the future of management research. *British Journal of Management*, 12 special issue S3-S26.