

Łukasz Sułkowski *

META-PARADIGMATIC COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE IN MANAGEMENT STUDIES

The paper proposes the use of the meta-paradigmatic analysis in investigating organizational problems. First, I analyse the phenomenon of multi-paradigmaticism in management studies. I will characterize four management paradigms accentuating the differences between them. Then, I will point to the potential relationships between the paradigms stressing the possibilities of combining cognitive perspectives. The meta-paradigmatic perspective can be particularly useful in the following fields: the theory of organization, organizational culture, knowledge management, human capital management and the methodology of management.

Keywords: management paradigms, meta-paradigmatic method, paradigms of social sciences

INTRODUCTION

Management studies are multi-paradigmatic and multi-methodical. What is more, there is no clarity regarding the criteria of paradigm classification. Still, since the multiplicity of organizational metaphors can broaden the knowledge of managers and organizational studies scholars, it seems that the use of various paradigms can in a similar fashion contribute to the increase of epistemological and methodological awareness in management. It is worth attempting to overcome the contradictions and the incommensurability of various paradigms, since the perception of organizational and management studies from various perspectives helps to understand these disciplines better.

The essay proposes the use of meta-paradigmatic analysis in investigating organisational problems. First, I analyse the phenomenon of multi-paradigmaticism in management studies. I will characterize four management paradigms accentuating the differences between them. Then, I will point to the potential relationships between the paradigms stressing the possibilities of combining cognitive perspectives. The meta-paradigmatic

* Public Affairs' Institute, Jagiellonian University in Cracow

perspective can be particularly useful in the following fields: the theory of organization, organizational culture, knowledge management, human capital management and the methodology of management.

1. MULTI-PARADIGMATICISM IN MANAGEMENT

Among several methods of distinguishing paradigms in management studies, the one that seems most useful in the cognitive sense is the concept of G. Burrell and G. Morgan (Table 1).

Table 1
Paradigms of social sciences

Epistemological principles concerning the ideal of science	Preferred social orientation		
		<i>Regulation</i>	<i>Radical change</i>
	<i>Objectivism</i>	Functionalism	Radical structuralism
<i>Subjectivism</i>	Interpretive/symbolic paradigm	Postmodernism	

Source: elaborated on the basis of Burrell and Morgan (1979)

This is mostly due to its general character that makes the theory applicable not only to organizational and management studies, but in fact to the majority of social sciences that address similar issues, such as: sociology, cultural anthropology, linguistics and, with certain restrictions, psychology and economics. Furthermore, the concept is deeply embedded in the philosophy of science and goes back to the roots of the basic cognitive dilemma between the objectivist (neo-positivist) vision of science based on the methodology of natural history and the subjectivist (or intersubjective) project indebted to the tradition of hermeneutics and aimed at the use of the “understanding” methods. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the idea of maintaining the status quo and the change-oriented attitude accurately conveys one of the basic cognitive dilemmas both in social sciences and in management. In fact, depending on the ideal of science they have consciously or subconsciously adopted, the majority of scholars in our discipline choose the model based either on the passive description of the existing form of organization or on the intervention in the investigated reality stimulating its change. Apart from this, Burrell and Morgan’s classification is quite commonly and creatively used in management studies.

As regards the initial model proposed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), I suggest to modify the names of the paradigms approaching the classification

of paradigms from a historical perspective that takes into account the development of management and related social studies at the turn of the 20th century. In order to conduct analyses in the field of management studies, I propose the use of four paradigms:

1. the Neo-positivist-Functionalist-Systems paradigm which combines objectivism with regulation,
2. the Interpretive-Symbolic paradigm which combines subjectivism with regulation,
3. the paradigm of radical structuralism (Critical Management Studies), formed at the meeting point of objectivism and the radical change,
4. radical humanism (postmodernism) – a paradigm combining subjectivism with radical change.

2. THE NEO-POSITIVIST-FUNCTIONALIST-SYSTEMS PARADIGM (NFS)

The paradigm that dominates in social sciences is labelled as “functionalist” or sometimes “neo-positivist”, “systems” or “quantitative” (Holmwood 2005). It sets natural history as a cognitive model. The paradigm is a combination of the influences of neo-positivist philosophy and the systems approach together with functionalism observed in social sciences and cultural anthropology. It has inherited the following principles of the Vienna Circle: verificationism, the coherence and the accumulation of power, the search for a universal scientific method, the division into dependent and independent variables, the drive towards mathematical modelling, and the quantifiable methodology (Neurath et al. 1996) Verificationism enables a permanent assertion of the cognitive value of the given statements through the empirical research in the subject matter (Parrini et al. 2003). This gives an opportunity to provide an unambiguous answer to the questions concerning the nature of an organization, its qualities and the ways it can be effectively managed. The accumulation of knowledge denotes trust in the fact that the scholars in the field of organizational studies build a stable edifice of knowledge which develops systematically and contributes to the continuous progress. The scholars seek a comparatively reliable “scientific method” that will help to discover and assess valuable knowledge. The system of dependent and independent variables enables one to create cause-and-effect relationships and feedbacks taking inspiration and basic metaphors from physical sciences perceived through the prism of Newton’s

(mechanistic) paradigm. Due to the necessity to create precise generalizations, the methodology of quantifiable research (the quantitative research) is valued more highly than the qualitative research. Management has also witnessed attempts of mathematical modelling and generalization aiming at a coherent image of organisational studies expressed in the universal language of nature – the language of mathematics (e.g. operational research, forecasting and simulation). The neo-positivist image of management remains the dominant paradigm and offers a “commonsensical” vision of the practiced discipline (Sułkowski 2004).

The second source of such orientation is the functionalist approach in sociology and cultural anthropology (Layton 1997, Elster 1990). It is characterized by a conviction that the social entity should maintain balance in the process of exchange between the elements of the social system. The majority of actions performed by the members of the organization aim to maintain the higher order of the social system. The “function” is the contribution of the partial activity to the total activity (Davis 1959). Functionalism in management leads to distinguishing a system of complementary organizational functions that maintain the operation of the whole (e.g. planning, organising, motivating, monitoring). A functionally unified and well-balanced social system guarantees harmonious and peaceful collaboration of its subsystems (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, pp. 192-193). Functionalism leads to the deterministic methodology which complies with the neo-positivist spirit and enables comprehending the patterns and repetitions in the social processes within the organization (Merton 1982).

The third area of inspiration for the trend is the systems concept which positions organizations at the level of complex social systems (Boulding 1956). This interdisciplinary approach proposes: the structural integration of subsystems within a larger entity and the emergence of specific features of the system at consecutive levels of complexity (Bertalanffy 1960). In this sense, the organization is a system that is subjected to limited control and maintains balance in the processes of the transfer of material and informational resources between the organization and the environment¹. The element that joins the systems approach with neo-positivism is the drive for the unification of science and the trust in building a universal scientific method based on a general theory of systems, while the associations with

¹ A similar study in the context of praxeological theory of organization can be found in J. Zieleniewski, *Organizacja i zarządzanie*, PWN, Warszawa 1969.

functionalism refer to the idea of system (functional) integration and homeostasis.

The Neo-positivist-Functionalist-Systems (NFS) epistemology is thus characterized by the orientation towards creating integrated systems and the verification of truth using objective quantitative methods. What plays the key role here is the analytical approach which offers a possibility of generalizing and modelling mathematically the research results. Social processes have an objective, cause-and-result character and are based on the following assumptions: the axiological neutrality of science and the non-interference of the researcher, the creation of possibly most general social theories and the mathematical modelling of the reality of social sciences. In social sciences, functionalists often apply the cognitive perspective of self-regulating social systems.

In management studies, NFS is the dominant cognitive concept. The majority of theories aim at realizing the neo-positivist ideal of science. Knowledge should be objective and universal. The created scientific theories can be represented as casual sequences of variables which can, at least potentially, be mathematically formalized. It is also postulated that the theory of management should be highly universal and verificationist, and should have predictive power. The tendencies that are most deeply rooted in this perspective include these directly connected with classical economics and technical sciences that gave birth to management studies (Martan 2002). The associations with microeconomics show themselves most conspicuously in the attempts to direct the development of management onto the path of "enterprise studies" (Lichtarski 2007). The systemic and functional vision of the organization is accompanied with the image of the human being who is close to the categories of *homo oeconomicus*. The quantitative methodology occupies an important position in such subdisciplines of management as: management accounting, logistics management or information management. However, quantitative survey methods are also useful for research of social, organizational phenomena like corporate culture and climate (Denison 1996).

The opponents of the functionalist-systems orientation in management argue that its vision is based on the epistemology of natural science which derives from the paradigm of mechanism and which has been supplanted in physics by the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics (Wheatley 1999). Functionalism is criticized for the static image of the organization and the lack of autonomy of the social subject. In enterprise studies, it is a vision of the human being doomed to hyper-rationalism. In a real organization,

conflicts, disintegrative processes, and imbalance occur more often than the homeostatic harmony (Holmwood 2005). The comprehensive vision of the organizational order can blur the elements that constitute meaning at the level of behaviour and interaction. Thus, the interpretations of the processes of establishing and holding power and property, communication between individuals and groups, shaping the elements of culture, or giving meaning to the organizational reality can be lost.

3. INTERPRETIVE/SYMBOLIC PARADIGM (IS)

The interpretive/symbolic paradigm emerged in opposition to functionalism. Its most important sources of inspiration are social sciences and humanities such as: sociology, psychology, political sciences and cultural anthropology. The attempt to reconstruct the principles of the interpretive/symbolic paradigm in management leads to several points including: social constructivism, the cognitive role of language in shaping the social reality and the practical aspect of cognitive activity. These epistemological assumptions hold in research programmes based on the qualitative methodology taken mostly from humanities (Blumer 1969).

Interpretive theories concentrate on describing interrelations in complex social and organizational structures departing from the cause-and-effect neo-positivist model. The key to creating a scientific theory is comprehension, grasping the gist from the point of view of an involved observer or a member of the organization (Sułkowski 2009). Theories are not to be created in the spirit of objectivism and axiological neutrality, but they should expose the intersubjective diversity of meanings and interpretations proposed by various organizational actors. In management studies, many theories related to organizational culture, HR management, supervision processes or management processes are based on the principles of the interpretive approach, examples of which are: K. Weick's theory of enactment, G. Morgan and L. Smircich's management of meanings, the organisational identity as seen by S. Albert and D.A. Whetten or J. Pfeffer and G.R. Salancik's "networks of power" (Weick 1979, Smircich 1983). The basis of interpretive theory is the assumption that the social and organisational reality has a constructivist and conventional character (Hatch 2002). The organizational order does not exist objectively, but is still maintained, reconstructed and modified by individuals and groups functioning within and around the organization. The organization and the management processes are

created by groups in the processes of institutionalization, legitimization and internalization, and they are a matter of convention – a collective consensus (Berger, Luckmann 1966). Economic interests exert the same impact as political, social and psychological factors. The human being in the organization is a person who is oriented towards values, who searches for the meaning and who involves themselves in a study situation. The cognitive act is embroiled in language and culturally relativized; it serves as a symbolic action. The results of the research are not objective; they can be only intersubjectively communicated. One may observe a focus on the categories of vernacular life which cover: perceiving, interpreting, defining and checking usefulness and operation (“epistemology of everyday life” (Suk-Young Chwe 2001, Deschamps 1996)).

The criticism of interpretive theorizing, expressed in the first place from the neo-positivist-functionalist perspective, is related to the lack of the universal character of the scientific theory. If organizational researches and analyses lead only to individual descriptions of, for instance, cultural studies, then the issue of the development of science, which, as the experience gathered in many fields shows, progresses towards the increasing generality, seems very problematic (Gibb Dyer, Wilkins 1991).

4. THE PARADIGM OF RADICAL STRUCTURALISM, CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES (CMS)

The paradigm of radical structuralism, also known as Critical Management Studies (CMS), is based on the principle of the existence of objective social reality which yet needs a fundamental restructuring. Social truths are hidden in the omnipresent micro- and macrostructures of power. The role of social sciences is to uncover the concealed mechanisms of power, domination and social inequality as well as to change the social awareness and reality. The paradigm of radical structuralism adopts a critical attitude towards the social *status quo* and the achievements of social sciences. The role of the scholar is to discover the social mechanisms and, more importantly, to change the social reality. The character of change is more oriented toward a revolutionary or punctuated equilibrium approach (Gersick 1991). The methodology of research has a qualitative character and is based on the involved methods.

The critical tendency in management studies takes its source from the philosophical doctrines which adopt a radical vision of the development of

organization and management seen as the foundations of domination and power. This idea goes back to Bentham's idea of panopticon and Karl Marx's class struggle. In the 20th century, the critique of the oppressive dimensions of organization was expressed by: the Frankfurt School, neomarxists, poststructuralists and postmodernists (Benhabib 1986). What also serves as an important point of reference is Jürgen Habermas's critical theory of communication (Habermas 1985). Considered the precursor of postmodernism, Michael Foucault raised the problem of power and domination as the basic driving force of social activities (e.g. the concept of knowledge-power) and the constant surveillance and control seen as the methods of enforcing obedience and submission in organizations and society (Michel 1976). P. Bourdieu, who introduced the term "symbolic violence," (Bourdieu 1990) was an important theoretician describing the objectively interpreted mechanisms of inequality, domination and power. Today, the continuation of his thought can be found in the critical approach to media and social communication represented by S. Hall and S. Deetz (Deetz 1995). Another trend following this direction is neo-Marxist feminism depicting the situation of women as a group that has been culturally dominated by false consciousness, the manipulation of identity and symbolic violence (Oakley 2000).

The theories formed on the basis of the paradigm of radical structuralism (CMS) share a few common principles.

1. Their researches focus on the same subject matter which includes the mechanisms of power, oppression, instrumentalism and domination in organisations and in management.

2. CMS is socially involved and supports groups subjected to oppression. In organizations, we have to deal with inequality and privileging some groups at the cost of others. Unequal social relations are concealed, rationalized and ideologized within the discourse of management studies and the managerial discourse. The aim of CMS is to uncover oppressiveness, domination and injustice, which would lead to the emancipation of groups discriminated against in organizations and in social life.

3. There is a clear axiological orientation of the scholar and the manager, which means that both the understanding of the organization and the understanding of the management are inevitably embedded in values. The language and the culture are not neutral media, but they serve as tools of domination and symbolic violence.

4. Accepted by all CSM scholars, the statement that the theory and practice that dominate in management studies are the rationalizations of the

existent, unjust status quo and thus, reinforce the reproduction of the unjust order and the ideology of managerialism. This means a tendency towards the radical criticism of the former managerial discourse.

5. The possibilities of changing the oppressive, unjust and frequently concealed social order are connected with the use of the involved methods of organizational cognition and change which lead to the abandonment of “false consciousness”.

The critical trend in management is fairly controversial because the principles underlying its foundations have an ideological character. Described as a persuasive discourse maintaining the oppressive social structures, management is perceived in a one-sided and ideological way. At the same time, Critical Management Studies have scientific ambitions that go back to neo-Marxist objectivism. Marxism postulated the “scientificity” of its own discourse, yet it has not managed to reach beyond the ideology.

5. THE APPROACH OF RADICAL HUMANISM, POSTMODERNISM (POST)

Proposed by Burrell and Morgan, the paradigm of radical humanism appears to be closest to postmodernism which is one of the most influential trends in modern humanities. Postmodernism is the least homogeneous cognitive approach of all. It is so incoherent that using the term “paradigm” in relation to postmodernism seems rather far-fetched. The common elements include subjectivism, cognitive relativism, the lack of programme coherence, and distrust towards science. The most important authors representing the poststructuralist and then postmodernist approach include: Michael Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Richard Rorty, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida and Zygmunt Bauman. Postmodernists question the possibility of reaching the objective truth (Engholm 2000, Boje et al 1996, Welge, Holtbrugge 1999, Burrell, Cooper 1998). The radical attitude of cultural relativism towards science was initiated in postmodernism by the strong programme for the sociology of science of the Edinburgh School. Its creators – D. Bloor and B. Barnes, oppose treating science as a sphere of culture with a special status and believe that the criteria of rationality and truth, similarly to the way we perceive reality, are culturally and socially conditioned. This means that scientific theories are the reflections of social ideologies (Bloor 1976). Postmodernists critically approach the idea of privileging science among other areas of culture. Approaching the issue from a historical perspective, P. Feyerabend

condemned the imperialism of science, noticing that “the apostles of science” suppressed the advocates of other cultures replacing their religions with the “religion of science” (Feyerabend 1975). The postmodern trend points to the fall of the metanarration of the Enlightenment project (the fall of the myth of progress) as a result of the uncritical pursuit of rationalism which leads to the instrumentalisation of mind against the humankind. The motives most frequently used in the theory of postmodernism include: the fragmentation of identity, the hyperreality, the loss of cognitive foundations and metanarration, the key role of discourse and language, and textualism (the perception of reality through the prism of textual metaphor) (Alvesson, Deetz 2005).

Postmodern epistemological relativism leads to the problem with the use of the scientific approach. Without the correspondence or the coherence theories of truth, the notion of the “scientific theory” does not make any sense. As a matter of fact, in the context of moderate postmodernism, one may speak only about “theorizing” in the broad meaning of the term.

In management, postmodernism occupies a peripheral position and, similarly as in other social sciences, it serves as a form of an extreme reaction against the earlier neo-positivist ambitions. Postmodernism introduces to management an element of criticism that does not cause the deconstruction of the object of management, but contributes to foregrounding the issue of cognition and social processes. Postmodernism is presented as a relativistic, subjectivist and anti-intuitive concept that goes against the common impressions of the majority of management specialists. I believe that the postmodern trend in management can be treated as a peculiar intellectual provocation that draws attention, in an exaggerated way, to the key epistemological and ethical problems. This is where the real value of postmodernism resides. We are facing the dilemmas of cognitive and cultural relativism, the problems of the researcher’s involvement, subjectivism and the ethical context, which should be the subjects of reflection (Scheurich 1997).

6. THE META-PARADIGMATIC METHOD

The division into paradigms has a key role in creating theories and selecting methods of research in management studies. The choice of the paradigm largely determines: the attitude to theorizing, the subject of research, the preferred methodology and the axiological orientation (Table 2).

Table 2
The structure of the scientific theory depending on the paradigm

Criteria	Functionalist-Systems paradigm	Interpretive/Symbolic paradigm	Critical Management Studies	Postmodernism in management
The elements of theory	1. Statements and definitions 2. Hypotheses 3. Opinions about facts 4. Variables 5. Cause-and-effect relations	1. Theoretical constructs 2. Interpretations 3. Interrelations 4. Descriptions and studies	1. Theoretical constructs 2. Opinions about facts 3. Actors and groups 2. Structures of power and interests	1. Narrations 2. Discourses 3. Opinions 4. Theoretical constructs
The results of theorizing	Sequential relationships of causal variables	Interpretations proposed by organizational actors embedded in the networks of meaning	Unmasking descriptions revealing the concealed relations of power and oppression, which leads to actions	Self-poietic discourses stimulating ethical reflection
The objectivism of theory	Objectivism	Intersubjectivism	Intersubjectivism	Subjectivism
The role of the given paradigm in management	Dominating	Increasing	Increasing	Peripheral
The verification and the falsification of theory	Verificationism or falsificationism	Interpretivism and constructivism	Interpretivism or weak verificationism	Constructivism
The key theoretical threads	1. Strategy 2. Structure 3. The functions of management 4. The theory of organization	1. Language 2. Organizational culture 3. Organizational behaviour	1. The human being in the organization 2. Power, oppressiveness, manipulation 3. The ideology of managerialism 4. Denaturalization of management	1. Textualism of the organization – rhetoric, poetics, archetypes, metaphors, paradoxes 2. The moral problems of managerialism
The dominating methodology	Quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	No methodology or qualitative
The attitude to valuation	Axiological neutrality	Moderate axiological neutrality	Involvement in valuation	Involvement in valuation

Source: own elaboration

In management studies, we face a variety of paradigms and ways of their classification. The majority of researchers operate within the given paradigm, though it is also possible to find some scholars postulating metaparadigmatic researches, or even a complete departure from the concept of paradigms in favour of purely pragmatic studies (Lewis, Grimes 1999, Miller 2007). The problem resides both in choosing one of the paradigms, defining the relations between them and drawing methodological consequences (Guba, Lincoln 1998, Brown 2010). The dominating standpoint involves a conscious or an unconscious choice of one of the paradigms and conducting a research and proposing interpretations on its basis. The accumulation of theories and results of the research is then limited to one paradigm, since there is no transfer of knowledge between the representatives of different cognitive perspectives. It seems that, though frequently practiced, the isolation of paradigms and mutual ignorance is not a cognitively effective solution. Researchers adopting radically different cognitive standpoints, based on different paradigms, should have an opportunity to confront their opinions and engage in a discussion. The metaparadigmatic reflection is a possible method of conducting an analysis of the concepts embedded in various paradigms. The multiparadigmatic approach can be identified in relation to the majority of organisational processes, such as the organizational culture, the strategy and the structure, power and authority, the organizational forms of behaviour and management ethics. It is crucial to initiate a discussion between the representatives of different paradigms and attempt at developing metaparadigmatic standpoints, since the isolation of the paradigms increases. The scholars who focus on the dominating paradigm rarely refer to the results of the researches based on alternative paradigms, despite the fact that such combinations, even in the field of methodology, are possible.

The representatives of the interpretive/symbolic trend and of radical structuralism (Critical Management Studies) form a fairly hermetic scientific environment which seems unable to start a discussion with the mainstream researchers. On the other hand, we also have a standpoint which indicates a need to form one's own paradigm in management studies which will make use of the achievements of other social sciences, but will be specific to our own discipline (Donaldson 1995).

The choice of the paradigm is made by means of adopting certain ontological, epistemological and axiological principles in the organizational reality by management theoreticians and researchers. Numerous management theories can be embedded in various paradigms. What lies at

the heart of metaparadigmatic reflection is a reflective juxtaposition of the results of researches and interpretations taken from various paradigms or even from different typologies of paradigms. Due to the wide variety of the ways of understanding and exploring organizations, one has to consider the relationships between management “paradigms”. There are a few possible interrelations between the paradigms:

1. The conflict of paradigms
2. The incommensurability of paradigms
3. The integration of paradigms
4. The hybridization of paradigms

1. From the logical point of view, it is usually impossible that two paradigms should be true, since they are based on contradictory assumptions. The concepts are antithetic; they form paradoxes and antinomies whose mutual relations can be based on criticism of the fundamental assumptions. The case of contradictory paradigms is fairly common in management studies. Taylorism and the school of social relations are rooted in different visions of human nature in the process of organizing. Modernism and postmodernism perceive management ontology, epistemology and axiology in a radically different way.

2. Incommensurability denotes the untranslatability of the concept. The discussion on the incommensurability of paradigms was initiated by T. Kuhn (Kuhn 2001). The radical standpoint postulating the impossibility of rational argumentation, reaching compromise or even communication is represented by the cognitive relativists, e.g. P. Feyerabend, the Edinburgh School or postmodernists (Feyerabend 1979). The presented examples of the juxtapositions – Taylorism versus the school of social relations or modernism versus postmodernism – indicate radically contradictory assumptions which can yet be the subject of comparison. Incommensurability is the case of completely different, incomparable concepts of the organizational reality.

3. Integration denotes combining paradigms by means of searching for common points and leaving contentious issues open to be solved (Gioia, Pitre 1990). G. Morgan noticed that the coexistence of a few paradigms, thanks to the synergetic effect, offers new possibilities of development for social sciences and organizational studies (Morgan 1983). Such integration is possible on the basis of conventionalism, since it is possible to assume that in the research we do not investigate the heart of the matter but we expose various points of view (what serves as a philosophical basis here is anti-essentialism and subjectivism), e.g., the integration of various organizational metaphors can be the source of knowledge for the manager and the scholar.

4. It is also possible to hybridize paradigms. Some cognitive attitudes can offer creative inspirations for other approaches. An example of such an interplay between paradigms is the hybridization of certain ideas of organizational culture on the basis of the functionalist and the interpretive paradigms based on the use of the critical tools of postmodernism (Schultz, Hatch 1996).

By definition, paradigms should be incomparable or contradictory. Still, it seems that it is possible to juxtapose them and indicate the differences, which can lead to the increase of reflexivity and thus, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of organization and management.

7. THE RESEARCH STRATEGIES BASED ON PARADIGMS

The choice of the research strategy depends on the paradigms preferred by the researcher. To put it simply, one may say that what dominates here is the contrast between the theories of the dominating paradigm (functionalism, neo-positivism, the systems approach) versus alternative theories (interpretivism, Critical Management Studies) (Table 3).

Table 3

The dominating paradigm vs. alternative paradigms

Criteria	The dominant paradigm	Alternative paradigms
The relationships between the elements of reality	Cause-and-effect, Repetitive	Interrelations, Repetitive as well as individual
The aims of the research	Generalization, verification, analysis, predicting and programming changes	Comprehension, description, synthesis, stimulating changes
The attitude of the researcher to the investigated reality	Objective, external point of view (<i>outsider</i>)	The participant of the investigated phenomena and processes (<i>insider</i>)
The attitude of the researcher to values	The pursuit of objective cognition that is free from valuation	Consciousness embroiled in values (axiological attitude)
Preferred methodology	Explanatory – providing predications based on abstract systems of concepts	Descriptive-explanatory or understanding (hermeneutic)
Preferred methods	Standardized, quantitative and structuralized methods	Non-standardized, qualitative and non-structuralized methods

Source: own elaboration based on Swedberg (1990), Morawski (2001)

The strategies of formulating theories can thus be located on the continuum delineated by the theories based on the dominant paradigm at the one end, and the alternative theories at the other. I propose a division into four strategies of creating theories:

1. functionalism,
2. interpretivism,
3. epistemological pluralism,
4. epistemological eclecticism.

What dominates the contemporary management studies is the strategy of “pure functionalism” which postulates the construction of research theory and methods that would include only the assumptions of the functionalist-neo-positivist-systems paradigm. Beginning with induction, the researcher creates hypotheses and tests them on the basis of the adopted methodology. Synthetic results of researches facilitate constructing verified theories. It is also possible to start from deduction connected with adopting the given cognitive construct verified by means of hypotheses. The method of the research usually focuses on quantitative methods.

The strategy of “pure interpretivism”, by contrast, focuses on the individual, extensive studies of the organization or comparative analyses which do not aim to verify the hypotheses. They are rather supposed to find the hermeneutically understood meaning and the significance of the behaviour of individuals and groups of people in organizations. They do not search for one consistent image either, since they can present conflicting approaches, visions and interpretations of various organizational actors and groups. The research methodology is mainly based on qualitative methods.

Similar to K. Weick’s “10 o’clock approach”, the strategy of “epistemological pluralism” postulates a possibility of combining attitudes taken from various paradigms, yet on the condition that we aim at coherent cognitive results. Another suggested method is the circular interpretation of the research process (Weick 1979). Thus, one may use both functionalist terms: hypothesis, verification or falsification, and interpretive notions of meaning and interpretation, or even critical terms such as false consciousness. The research methodology aims at complementarity (methodological triangulation) and assumes a possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods, including the involved methods.

Similarly to pluralism, the strategy of “epistemological eclecticism” postulates a possibility of combining theories and methods taken from various paradigms. The difference resides only in the attitude to the research results. Eclecticism allows for contradictions in the results of the research,

from which an image of the organization or management that does not have to be coherent or uniform will emerge. To the contrary, as in the case of G. Morgan's metaphors (Morgan 1997), it should present the multidimensionality and complexity of organizational processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Similarly to other social sciences, management studies explore complex objects and processes which are in many ways investigated and analysed by the representatives of various paradigms. The above proposal of the classification of four paradigms on the basis of Burrell and Morgan's theory is quite commonly used in many social sciences and, it would seem, plays a crucial role also in management.

The exploration of such multidimensional processes as: organizations, management, culture or organizational structures and strategies also demands a meta-paradigmatic approach, which involves the use of various theories and methodologies that can be incommensurate or even contradictory. The attempt to combine paradigms should be, therefore, accompanied with epistemological consciousness and adopting a pluralist approach or methodological eclecticism.

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