



THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the human influence, and ethical challenges business management researchers face, both as business students or academics in business management research. The paper intends to prepare the minds of business students with respect to the politics of access and the ethical dilemma in business management research and the vehicles within which they could explore to proffer solutions to contemporary business management problems. The study takes the qualitative research approach and adopts judgemental and snowball sampling techniques. Data collection was primarily interviews with unstructured questions, while discourse analysis was the basis for analyzing the views of the different participants. The study finds out that businesses are sceptical about business management researchers; thus, access to information and data is mostly through recommendations or introductions from influential characters. The study also revealed that there is a weak link between business research findings and action, which does not encourage people to pursue career paths. However, finds also revealed that implementation and utilization of research findings are becoming more practical and applied in the business world. Conclusively, there are no clear and straightforward answers nor solutions to the political web in any business management research process. Political and personal interests, power differences, and ethical dilemmas are key factors that influence access to business management research data and information. Therefore, a researcher needs both purpose and flexibility in tackling the political influence and ethical dilemma in business management research. It further recommended that even though there are no hard-and-fast ethical principles in business management research, that the business management researcher's considerable judgment is critical for good practice.

Keywords: Political web, Ethics, Human influence, Business management, research

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One famous school of thought among scholars is that research is an ivory tower activity. Researchers research for the pursuit of knowledge. One fact is glaring among researchers; they define research questions and issues according to the current state of knowledge and the curiosity of the researcher's intellect. Knowledge is certainty, authoritativeness, and it is valuable. Therefore, it is a good thing to be knowledgeable. Knowledge is generally agreed ideas in society at a point in time. Martin (1998) reported that interest groups affect the creation and use of knowledge"; thus, the concept of knowledge is dynamic. The dynamic nature of knowledge also applies to business ideas and products designed to solve problems in societies. funding, disciplines, hierarchy, and competition are factors that strongly influence both professional and student research.

Research studies come with different kinds of challenges. These challenges include production of valid debut unpopular results and difficulty in having access to research data and information. For instance, research scholars like Socrates and Galileo were condemn by the Governments of their times, for holding unpopular beliefs through their research works. (www.Eyewitnesstohistory.com and Wikipedia.com). Access to research data and information is the major challenge that business management researchers face in conducting research. The challenges are as a result of the political, ethical and power play influence or impact on access to research data and information in business management research.

Politics in the context of this paper means the power relationships between the individuals and the institutions involved in the research enterprise, whereas ethical issues relates to rules of behaviour



based on ideas about what is morally right or wrong. Power play here refers to the influence big political personalities, high level stakeholders and business executives bear on the business managers. All these factors influence access to business management research data and information in one way or the other.

Crucial relationships one must consider in a research setting may include the relationship between students and supervisors, funders and grant holders, authors and journal editors, companies and research institutes, project leaders and research assistants, researchers and business managers, or managers and their bosses. No doubt, the relationships outlined above suggest the exertion of some level of influence by one over the other on a research process, when, gathering, use of information, and evaluation of the result(s) of the research. There is significant difference between business management research and social science/psychological research. In social science and psychological researches, less powerful people in the society are focus on as research subjects hence access to them is easier. Slatter (1989) opines that the bad, the mad, and the ill receive the most attention from social researchers. Where as in business management research may have to do with data or information from corporate business organisations and executives which access to may not be easy as would be expected. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, (2012) reported that business management controls, influences, and structures others'

The focus of this paper is on how political and ethical issues and business interest consideration affect or influence business management research and how researchers in business management can adapt their approach to get the desired information for their research.

2.0 THE RESEARCH METHOD

This study seeks to investigate how politics and ethical considerations affect business management research. The study adopts a qualitative approach. this approach was adopted because it reinforces the understanding and the interpretation of meaning and intentions

underlying human interactions. Research subjects (respondents) were selected from the academia and business community. The techniques for participants selection are that of judgemental and snowballing. First, the researcher specifically selected participants who would contribute to the research topic and share their experiences in business management research in line with (Crabtree & Miller, 1992) method. it was done by actively selecting participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study set by (Marshall, 1996). After the initial selection, the sample size was expanded by asking the identified participants to refer others willing to provide relevant input on the research topic, snowball sampling (Marshall, 1996). Finally, information was collected using in-depth interview. discourse analysis was used to review participants' opinions that form the core findings. The primary research question guiding this research is: what aspect of business management research is most challenging?

Overview of researchers and research stakeholders' dynamics

Business research is the process of acquiring detailed information on all the areas of business and using such information in maximizing the sales and profits of the business. As such, research is critical to make wise and informed decision (Trueman, 2021). According to Hamza (2015), business success directly depends on the strategies and the goals of the business. if the strategies are properly implemented to achieve the goals and objectives of the business, then growth and profit occurs. Hamza (2015) listed the importance of business management research to include: contributing towards development of new strategic directions and ideas, evaluating and re-evaluating the current processes and providing better ideas to make the current process efficient in forecasting and predicting the future trend of the business. It also enhances the understanding of what consumers want and how they view the company. Another important goal of business research is the invention and development of new business practices, rather than simply examining existing ones. Business researchers are influenced by various factors. (Trueman, 2021), identified factors that influence business research to include: Age, gender, ethnicity, and social class. Whereas



Hamza (2015) identified Politics, socio-culture, technology, laws and environment as factors that influence business research.

The major purpose of business research is to provide executives knowledge regarding the organization, the markets, the economy, finance and the sales. Business intelligence enables the executives of the company to make better and rational decisions based on the results provided by the research. Business management is about controlling, influencing, and structuring others' awareness (Easterby-Smith, Thrope & Jackson, 2012). This process is political and full of influence because it achieves some coherence and direction. Business management research is challenging because of some human factors influencing business management research These factors are reviewed below

The Politics in Business Management Research

Politics is an important activity that results from differences in the self-interest of individuals. In conducting business research, the research subjects are very likely to be more potent than most researchers. Furthermore, most business organizations have a distinct structure and control mechanism, so gaining access to top management is challenging. Top managers can decline to provide information to researchers if they consider that the research may expose their organization's inefficiencies. ethically and morally. Also some managers find it extremely difficult to handle face-to-face interviews with some researchers hence, such managers often decline interactions with those they consider strangers. Organizations that consider information business secret tend to hinders researcher's access to information and if they grant researchers access to information, they would likely attach conditions. For example, they will consider the significance of the information to volunteer, what use the information might be put to, and those to use the information. In this regard, business managers are likely to influence the researcher in business management research.

Political Influences on the Research Question

Some business management researchers would rarely explain where their ideas and questions

have come from; doing so is best described as disclosing their motives and aspirations (Easterby-Smith, Thrope and Jackson, 2012), which may question the element of independence and objectivity that researchers are out to cultivate. One factors that can influence business management research is the attitudes and influence of external stakeholders, such as political influence of business manager influence on research question. Boissevain's (1974) study on social networks focusing on the Sicilian Mafia identified two distinct players in the research process, brokers and patrons who significantly influence research question.

The Researcher's Experience

Experience is a necessary ingredient and a good piece of knowledge in human activities. Hence, a researcher's background may influence what he can see or a question to seek answers. Therefore, experience is a motivator, sensitizer, and filter for the business researcher. Nevertheless, individual researchers have varying motivating factors. Platt (1976) opines that "many researchers in the early stages of their works are unclear about their aims and goals; some may be able to define what they intend to achieve in terms of career goals, political aims, and agenda to create change in their respective organizations." In conducting business research, fieldwork is essential; thus, a researcher's background, especially the social background is likely to affect the ease with which a researcher gains access to different settings or the different groups under investigation. One person or a group of persons (team) can carry out a research but as a team with members having different backgrounds and interests in business research is an added advantage that brings flexibility and synergy. A team conducting business management research will balance perspectives, backgrounds, and skills; this may likely be more effective than one individual conducting similar research.

The Team dynamics

In business management research, politics and other problems will surface. Such internal dynamics would be likely affected by external pressures. A study conducted in the UK on UK/China decision-making project highlighted



this fact (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999). In the study, a team comprising both the UK and Chinese nationals investigated management decision-making factors. It was surprising to the researchers that the UK companies the team was seeking to gain access into were more interested in talking to UK nationals and reluctant to talk to the Chinese team members. It is the kind of unincorporating and hostile attitude that would affect the internal relationship, even if the study team consciously resisted it. Easter by-Smith, Thrope and Jackson (2012) equally reported the case of grant holders, who award a research grant and research officers hired to carry out a research work. They contend that the relationship would become more complex as potentials opportunity for conflict emerge. In this case of grant holders and researchers, grant holders' power is the control of their funds, which is a substantial influence on the future career of the researcher; while the researcher's power is the knowledge and experience the researcher comes with into the research process and the potentials to withhold cooperation. That is to say that both the grant holder and the researcher can exert influence throughout the research process, but the balance would vary in the course of the research.

Academic stakeholders

The relationship between project supervisors and research staff or their students is a crucial power dynamic of influence of one party over the other. There is a growing expectation that graduate students must publish one or two papers out of their dissertation or thesis with their supervisors. However, within the academic world of research, there may be other dynamics. Research Councils influence researchers on research direction through control of funds; journal editors, referees, and conference organizers act as final arbiters of academic quality; senior academics control career rewards.

Funding body's influence

There is an old saying that "he who pays the piper dictates the tone." Funding may not dictate the result in business management research, but it provides robust steering. Most times, there is an explicit link between research funding and donors' goals. A research proposal that meet such research

councils' priorities stands a chance to be funded. Undoubtedly, it is also another danger. If research funding becomes more responsive to political priorities and pressures. A group may use research results to directly harm another (Easterby-Smith, Thrope& Jackson, 2012). There is also the possibility that researchers compromise the research process and their findings to favor the sponsors. It is a fact and in agreement with the famous saying that "he who pays the piper not only calls the tune but can define what a good tune is." Hence, business researchers need to be mindful of the personal and social consequences of losing out in the power play. Thus, the need to pay attention to ethical issues in any business research process.

Homestyle

In almost every institution of higher learning, most academic departments have their style, which supports and encourage a particular type of work. Every department in institutions of higher learning prioritize its research interests and style. Though it might be challenging to find suitable supervisors and examiners initially, it would go a long way to set business research focus on society's problem-solving. The ideal student supervisor is the one who knows a lot about the subject under investigation.

Conference

Conferences provide valuable medium for contacts within the academic community (Steinveg (2021), thus, prospective business researchers need to attend suitable conference circuits. Sometimes, people argue that most conferences are not competitive because organizers may accept papers from people who are ready to paddle into research and publications provided the paper to present meets the specified requirements. In whatever form and manner people look at conferences, it is the proper stepping stone for newcomers in business management research, especially when the paper(s) is or are concern with issues within the local environment.

Corporate stakeholders

Corporate stakeholders are companies and others within the user community. These entities are vital



because they are both sponsors and users of business management research findings. Most companies invest strategically in research and development to remain competitive and gain strategic market share for dominance. Companies are partnering with institutions of higher learning and other specialized research institutes through enterprise development programmes. These partnerships are creating opportunities for strategic knowledge transfer resulting from sponsorships of various consulting/research projects.

Funded research is contaminable. The contamination may come as research funders are likely to influence ongoing research. On the other hand, contamination may come from people's deliberate response to organization-based research questions by feeding information into the research process intended to support their political agendas. The study's topic or problem is likely to influence the research process, direction, independent of people and data it would contact and gather within the study

Approaches to Business Management Research

(i) **Team Approach:** The team approach comes with substantial preparation and planning. The approach emphasizes some differentiation of roles between the research designers, those who gather data and information, and those who analyse and interpret data (Hall *et al.*, 2007). This approach's major disadvantage is that a sizeable hierarchical team would find it difficult to operate within the research environment's unpredictability, thus requiring effective and efficient research process management.

(ii) **The Private Agent Approach:** Under this approach, research students and lone academics work independently, developing ideas, using their resources, and making the best use of whatever opportunities available. At some point, researchers working with this model require some elements of coordination and assistance; there is no need to downplay it where the need arises. The model requires

both flexibility and specialization in the role members' play in the research process.

(iii) **The Hybrid Approach:** This is a model between the Team and Private agent models. Researchers working under this model require a team of three to seven persons, either students or funded researchers, working together on a particular business problem. The model emphasizes considerable interdependence between team members. While some team members are assigned contact responsibilities, others are assigned data handling and analysis; others may be responsible for logistics and group coordination. The approach is quite germane when dealing with a research process characterized by conflicting expectations and tight deadlines.

(iv). **The Investigative or Conflict Approach:** Under this model, researchers can assume that influential organizations and individuals are likely to struggle to control and repress research findings indicting them; thus, some deception elements are legitimate and necessary. Researchers are required to use available opportunities to gain access, gather data and go further to publish research findings without delay regardless of attendant consequences. The model is only considered appropriate for exposing fraud, injustice, misuse of power, and organizational myths (Douglas, 1976). The model poses many threats to non-investigative researchers in the future, as gaining access to companies would be difficult.

3.0 POLITICAL AND ETHICAL INFLUENCE ON BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

The Politics of Access in Business Management Research

Sophie Gilliat-Ray, (nd) sees research "as a socially constructed process, where individuals, professional networks, or business organizations negotiate about who does what (or not), and what



conditions or processes of regulation will either constrain or empower the researcher." Thus, the human influence remains one overarching theme that determines who gets the nod to commence a research process, who gets access to top managers for company data to facilitate a research process. The politics and ethics of business research essentially boil down to power dynamics within the organization or who from external can influence top managers to grant access. In a research process, access to data is an ongoing negotiations process (Cooksy & McDonald, 2019) and can cover up the bureaucracy; business management research is no exception.

In every business management research, access to organizations or research participants is either formal or informal. Formal access involves gaining permission from organizational managers to gather data within the organization. In contrast, the informal process involves no official permission, yet, researchers access people and documents for data and information gathering, which they use in the research process. Unfortunately, most business management researchers often underestimate the time, patience, and resources required to gain initial access to organizational managers for data collection to facilitate the research process. However, there is a growing acceptance of case studies as several middle and senior-level managers are now products of Business Schools. Nevertheless, managers do not like issues threatening their operations; thus, they will monitor all organization's areas under investigation.

Gaining access is challenging; thus, a business management researcher may need to employ personal relationship with employees to get desired information no matter how frustrating it may be. If the research is for an award, the supervisor or institution may help.

Once a researcher establishes the initial contact with an organization for research information, the organization would like to consider two central questions (i) Is this individual worth supporting? (ii) Is it possible to sell to other managers in the organization whose cooperation the researcher is

seeking help? The answers to both questions concern the potential benefits of the research outcome compared to the cost of allowing the researcher to access the organization's data. Consideration would also be in the areas of whether the research is politically sensitive, the reputation of researching individual, the subject of study relevance and benefit to the organization. The organization would also consider the man hour employees would spend in participating in the research process, whether it will be detrimental to the organization's productivity.

Business researchers are optimistic that every access gained in a research process will end successfully. However, both external and internal dynamics can frustrate an already gained access process. Furthermore, the principle of reciprocity is always permanent in every business research process; the more the organization gives in time or money, the more it expects in exchange. Thus, authorized access is just the beginning of every business research process, and after that, the researcher obtains cooperation and builds trust inside the organization. Most times, this depends on the researcher's skills in dealing with what is, at some point, considered very complex interpersonal relationships because of the conflict of interest within the organization.

Managers are protective in several dimensions and would weigh the costs and benefits of extending access or cooperation. While some would be interested in the study subject and are ready to talk through interviews, others would talk less, perhaps with short replies that keep researchers wondering about the possibility of going through the research process. Some participants would respond with questions to evaluate researchers' experience and knowledge on the issue under investigation, all with a view of determining who controls the interaction process; even researchers with experience get caught up in this cross-examination process.

On the human influence, business researchers do find themselves between two contending interests. The one whose position the study tends to canvass for will surely do all that is at his disposal to



provide data, while the other would be reluctant to volunteer data to complete the research process successfully. The conflict of interest, which is core in business management research, can result in the stoppage of several pieces of research midway into their lives. The trust is that business researchers need to prepare for conflict issues that are far deeper and more complex than would be evident to a relatively new customer in any organization.

Ethical issues influence on business management research.

Ethics is generally about good practice rules, respect, honesty, and openness in any process. Ethical issues are bound in every business management research, but researchers are encouraged to be mindful in whatever form these issues crop up. **Ethical considerations in business management research are essential. Resnik (2011) posits that "ethical lapses in research can significantly affect the subject of study, participants, and the public." Ethics promotes knowledge, avoidance of error, truth and in stills critical values in teamwork, particularly in business management research.** Business management research requires researchers to understand values explicitly, examine and clarify traditions, perspectives, social processes, and attitudes of self and others (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 2002). Saha and Kulkarni (2011) reported that **"business management researchers do face ethical dilemma** of a different nature compared to those most frequently confronted by other **researchers**. Ethical principles in business management research, suggests considerable judgment from the researcher as good practice. Therefore, every business management researcher should follow critical ethical principles.

A key ethical consideration by research subject in business research is betrayal of the confidence reposed by the participants during the cross-examining process. Politically adept participants are likely to read beyond the lines that the interviewer is asking. Thus, the major ethical issues in business management research may include: (i) the use of participants' observation research method is deceitful Ditton, (1977). Snell

(1993) argues that ethical issues in research are incredibly complex as they involve the dynamics of power and the competing claims of different ideologies.

4.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The conduct of business research costs money, and decisions about who gets funding are political. Top Managers of businesses and other sponsors will decide if and how much money the firm will spend on a particular research project. This decision-making will reflect the current debate about what should or should not be researched or funded. Although top management does frame the terms of reference for most initiatives in consultation with senior researchers, there are occasions when individual interest has had undue influence, much to the consternation of researchers.

The study finds that business organizations are skeptical of researchers conducting business management research. As a result, access to companies for information mostly depends on the personal relationship of the researcher and management staff. Top managers in businesses sometimes are reluctant to grant access, but recommendations or introductions from influential characters in society had paved the way for even neophyte researchers. Some participants revealed that access does come informally from relatively line managers. However, researchers hardly tie such reports to the focus companies; thus, they make mere generalizations.

Another finding of the study is that a well-accessed business management research process could be terminated midway into the research process due to human influence.

The study also identified weak link between business research findings and action, especially in Nigeria, a scenario not very pleasant to many people, including researchers with commitment. It is more disappointing when a researcher notice that result of his hard work is just lying waste in a dustproof cabinet. However, people do have different expectations of how research findings should be put to use. In academic work, researchers' expectation of research findings is



that, it should attract corporate sponsorship, be published as articles in learned journals, published as chapter(s) in a Book, or be recommended for future study to obtain a higher degree, etcetera.

Business political considerations and ethical issues are key constrain to business management researcher in gaining access to information and data in business organizations.

Business management research remains a vehicle to communicate to both current and potential customers. It further helps identify threats and opportunities in the competitive market environment. It provides an opportunity for companies to use the findings to plan further investments and financial resources management. It will enable business managers to update their operations to current trends and innovations to keep pace with the marketplace dynamics. A focused business management research will help a company build capacity and attain a better market position.

Business research helps business managers understand customers' buying patterns, preferences, and pain points, gain deeper insights into the competitors, current market trends, and demographics. Business research is a vehicle to develop effective strategies to understand the demand and supply of the market. Business managers' desire to invest in business research will help such companies stay ahead of the competitor. With business research, companies can reduce costs and design solutions to meet market demand and target audiences.

The study also finds that business management researchers may not entirely rely on rigid standards when seeking classified information for

the conduct of a particular study. Sometimes, researchers go outside the bureaucracy to gain information for research purposes, which is an ethical challenge. Nevertheless, researchers hardly betray participants' confidence.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

It is essential to acknowledge that power and political influences, and ethical issues are part and parcel of business management research, even if they may not be so glaring. There are no clear and straight forward answers nor solutions to the political web in any business management research process. Political interest exists in ideologies, personal interests, power differences, and ethical dilemmas. Business management research has a lot of benefits which business organizations can leverage on yet due to political considerations and business ethics, business managers often make access to data and information challenging to business management researchers.

5.2 Recommendations

- I. Business management researchers needs both purpose and flexibility in tackling the political influence in business management research.
- II. Business managers should not see researchers as threats but as agents of change to enhance operations and proffer solutions to contemporary business challenges.
- III. Even though there are no hard-and-fast ethical principles in business management research, the business management researcher's considerable judgment is critical for good practice.



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