

Evidence Based Management

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AIM Workshop

Problematizing Evidence Based Management

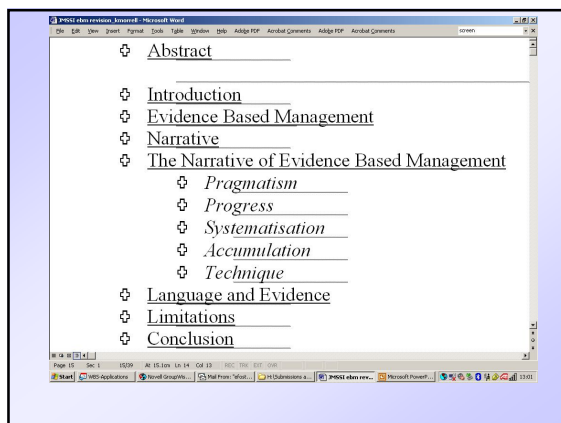
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Overview

- 'Problematizing Evidence Based Management'
- Response to reviewers
- Questions

Problematizing Evidence Based Management

A popular contemporary justification for the adoption of practice is that it is 'evidence based'. This paper critically examines the implications of this justification for management studies. This done from the perspective of narrative theory - an approach to analysing texts that focuses on how the stories within those texts are made provocative or compelling, and hence powerful. Effective stories deploy devices that establish (i) credibility and (ii) defamiliarisation. Using this analytical approach the paper identifies and examines different ideological devices in the literature on evidence based management: *pragmatism, progress, systematisation, technique, accumulation*. These are the means by which advocates of evidence based approaches try to construct a compelling story about the value of this mode of research. Prior criticism of the evidence based approach has largely centred on epistemological and technical issues. The aim here is to use an aesthetic mode of criticism to highlight political and moral implications. These are important given the relationship between claims to knowledge and the use of power; and the interaction between management research, and management as practice.



Response to Reviewers

'1' was very critical, and unfair in some respects as I try to show in my response. Though I have responded to their criticisms fully in the response letter. I am not convinced any revision would be to their satisfaction whilst preserving the basic line: i.e. identifying problems with evidence based approaches - this can be inferred from their suggestion that an alternative mode of review would 'naturally lead to revised conclusions'. Even so, I have made considerable efforts to give a detailed response to each of their points.

'2' is very favourable, though offering four suggestions for improvement: (i) to elaborate on what replication research means, (ii) to be clearer about the method used for analysing text, (iii) to strengthen the conclusion and (iv) to demonstrate critical reflexivity as to the limitations of this approach. I believe I have responded to each of these in full.

'3' is more critical than '2', but similarly identifies four specific limitations and suggestions for addressing them: (i) clarity as to who is being argued against, (ii) clarity as to the contribution; (iii) need to convince readers that the themes of 'angst' and 'realpolitik' offered something over and above 'well-trodden ground'; (iv) need for greater clarity as to the method used. I believe I have responded to each of these with significant revisions to the manuscript that are outlined in the response to their comments.

Response to Reviewers 1

Points of disagreement following comments

- The suggestion that the original submission does nothing more than critique the medical model is inaccurate.
- The suggestion that alternative forms of review (realist synthesis and meta-ethnography) were overlooked is, I argue, mistaken.
- Inaccurate and tendentious quoting from the original submission implied a failure to discuss the technique of systematic review in sufficient depth. The correct quote shows: (a) the technique was described in greater detail than implied by the reviewer, (b) the submission made it clear that use of the label systematic review was problematic and contested, (c) the account was supported by reference to other authors'.
- The charge that the original submission 'consistently misquoted' from one influential paper was factually inaccurate, and also misleading.
- The suggestion that this paper is not novel is supported by reference to unsubstantiated 'discussions' and 'preoccupations', rather than published work.

Additions in the revision following comments

- Extended discussion of [Pawson] and [Hammersley].
- The revision is far clearer as to the methodological approach taken – using narrative theory.
- Several sections have been revised, shortened and the labels 'Angst' and 'realpolitik' dropped.

Response to Reviewers 2

- (i) to elaborate on what replication research means: clarified and developed this in the paper by drawing on: Bornstein 1991; Glass, 2000; Hendrick 1991; Tsang and Kwan 1999; Mone and McKinley, 1993
- (ii) to be clearer about the method used for analysing text: I use narrative theory to analyse the different strands in this story and analyse how this approach is furnished with credibility and novelty. Thank you very much for your descriptor 'meta-discursive'
- (iii) to strengthen the conclusion: I have framed my account and contribution in terms of the attempt to reclaim some of the linguistic turf colonised by advocates of evidence based management ('systematic', 'transparent', 'narrative' etc.). The paper has been revised so that there is a substantial discussion section following the analysis of the 3 strands which should make reading the paper feel less 'flat' in the sense that there is a clearer trajectory to the argument, and that it develops rather than simply reiterating earlier ideas. This discussion section takes the critique forward. As such I feel it makes a theoretical contribution to how we think of the relationship between the academy and other stakeholders and the relationship between 'theorizing and evidence'.
- (iv) to demonstrate critical reflexivity as to the limitations of this approach: I think this was excellent advice, thank you. I have tried to state the limitations of the approach more clearly by making it clear that the paper itself is a story. Developing these both come from a clearer statement of method, which allows discussion of the limits to narrative approaches. I included a new 'limitations' section to this end.

Response to Reviewers 3(a)

- (i) clarity as to who is being argued against: substantially revised introductory sections of the paper... second para refers to 9 influential organisations in management/social policy, and 3 papers in management/social policy. The next para refers to another 15 papers and 1 book in management/social policy. The revision includes discussion of 3 additional, recent systematic reviews: Denyer and Neely (2004), Leseure et al (2004) and Pittaway et al (2004); and a forthcoming book on evidence based policy (Pawson, 2006), revised introduction, and the revised section titled 'evidence based management' make this much clearer I think.
- (ii) clarity as to the contribution (which community cares): Thank you I think it was good advice to include a fresh paragraph right at the beginning to clarify the nature of the contribution (second para). Revisions in the first section of the main body of the paper constitute a clearer statement as to the 'literature in management' you are arguing against'. I introduce three ways of describing this community: 'school' (McKinley, Mone and Moon, 1997), 'language community' (Bennett, 1989, p. 51) and 'epistemic community' (Haas, 1989). Any suggestion or claims that there is a 'best' (most thorough, rigorous or systematic etc.) way to carry out a literature review should attract wide interest, since this activity is common to all research. Solesbury identifies the increasingly instrumental attitudes in the orientations of funding bodies such as the ESRC, JRF and Nuffield Foundation as the revision now cites clearly – this should also make different communities of scholars care.

Response to Reviewers 3(b)

- (iii) convince readers re 'angst' and 'realpolitik': I have rewritten these sections, removed the labels, and included discussion of these themes within the five devices I identify as establishing the narrative in evidence based management. I have retained them in some form because I think they add to the discussion – these themes have not been considered with specific reference to evidence-based management but it is important to point out their implications for this particular way of pursuing management research... The paper still references 'well-trodden ground' but in a briefer fashion, and in such a way as to weave this into the main body of the paper.
- (iv) greater clarity as to the method used: I agree that description in the original submission referring to critical discourse analysis was mistaken, and have more clearly stated the approach taken to analysing texts in the resubmission. I use narrative theory to analyse the different strands in the literature, arguing that the extant literature on can be seen as telling a story, which furnishes an 'evidence based' approach to research with credibility and novelty, the two features of effective narrative (Barry and Elmes 1997). I think this offers more clarity and structure in methodological terms. Following Barry and Elmes (1997), I trace the roots of a narrative approach to Russian formalism, and Schölovski's (1917) idea that effective narratives satisfy two criteria: they establish credibility, and accomplish defamiliarisation... additional reference to support this is made to (Bennett, 1989; Erlich, 1980; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004; Omega and Land, 1996; Steiner, 1984). To improve description of methodology further, I follow the advice of another reviewer, by framing the approach as 'meta-discursive' and describe the analytical focus more clearly. 'The goal is to scrutinise claims associated with evidence-based approaches at a meta-discursive level'; in other words, to analyse how the main narrative underpinning an evidence based account of management research has developed and is substantiated across different texts.'

Questions...