

Management Accounting Research Approaches: A Critical Review

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Abstract

The management accounting field uses three research approaches: mainstream, interpretive and critical. These paradigms involve employing distinct research methodology whilst studying topics related to management accounting. The distinction in research methodology was made based on assumptions about the nature of social science and nature of society. Various scholars had used those assumptions to categorise research prototypes. Among them, the frameworks developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), Hopper and Powell (1985, Chua (1986) and also Rayan and Scapens (2002) are all noteworthy. Therefore, the aim of this study is to critically review these frameworks as a way to identify their similarities and differences among them. On the basis of the review, it is observed that perspectives of management accounting were originated from an extremely long means of travel, and there are lots of similarities and significant differences among the frameworks reviewed.

Keywords: nature of social science, nature of society, mainstream, interpretive, critical

1. Introduction

Management accounting research has drawn the attention of many scholars of accounting, and numerous studies have been conducted and various organisational theories, for instances contingency theory of management accounting and institutional theories, are suggested. This is because management accounting and management accountants are understood by both scholars and practitioners as strategic partners at the organisational team within their organisational process, both contributing to building value into the organisation by managing the resources, operations and people to accomplish its goals (Hilton, 2001). Langfield-Smith and Baines (2003) added that managers require information as a way to create both operational and strategic decisions within a busy environment throughout the appropriate usage of management accounting practices. Moreover, an organisatin's accounting information system plays an important part in improving the organisational performance by offering relevant information (Haleem et al., 2020).

Since the 1970s, attention in the advancement of diverse perspectives on accounting studies has increased, although it has also been criticised: for example, absence of accounting theory within the organisational practices has been pointed out. Various schools of thought have now been presented with various approaches for understanding the accounting nature in a broader institutional and sociological context. Different perspective on accounting resulted in the usage of different methodological approaches in accounting research.

The development of different schools of thoughts within social and institutional characteristics, particularly, Hopper and Powell (1985), Chua (1986) and Ryan and Scapens (2002), attracted in the philosophical framework created by Burrell and Morgan (1979). For that reason, this article is meant to critically review the frameworks developed by Hopper and Power (1985), Chua (1986) and Ryan and Scapend (2002) beginning from Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework. The similarities and differences among those frameworks will also be presented.

The reminder of the article is arranged at a sequential arrangement of each framework is developed. Thus, first four sections have been devoted to review the frameworks evolved from Burrell and Morgan (1979), Hopper and Powell (1985), Chua (1986) and Ryan, and Scapens (2002). Conclusion is offered at the final section.