

50 Years of Organizational Behavior Research in Taiwan: Approach, Turnaround, and Reflection

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The development of organizational behavior research in Taiwan has been approximately 50 years. This paper reviews both the logic and the transition of research approaches, including etic approach, cross-cultural approach, indigenous approach, and globalized approach. On one hand, this essay indicates that the advantages and disadvantages of different types of research methods employed by organizational behavior researchers. On the other hand, by depicting the context and background of the transition of each research approach, this essay highlights the theoretical contribution of different research approaches, thus shedding some light on further studies.

Keywords: *organizational behavior, etic approach, cross-cultural approach, indigenous approach, globalized approach, full-cycle approach*

Research on organizational behavior (OB) in Taiwan has historically been transplanted from the United States through the translation of American textbooks, training materials, and other relevant literature, as well as the replication of popular research and practice in America. Hence, it is profoundly influenced by mainstream American academics and follows the “scientist and practitioner” paradigm, according to which scientific research should have both theoretical and practical value. This paradigm also states that research and practice should complement each other (“no research without action, no action without research”), and that “there is nothing as practical as good theory” (Lewin, 1943). However, due to increasing awareness of differences in organizational situation and cultural context, local OB research is gradually progressing. Taiwan is also developing its own research topics and approaches in the OB field.

In terms of research topics, OB researchers in Taiwan have held a “retrospect and review” seminar once every 10 years since 1992, which gives researchers an overview of previous OB research and keeps them apprised of the latest developments and unsolved problems. As a result,

researchers have had many opportunities to reflect on the content and topics of OB research, making its themes increasingly definite and comprehensive. However, compared with research topics, the development path and research approaches have received much less attention in the Taiwanese OB field. Hence, it is necessary to further clarify the development path of Taiwanese OB research by exploring its context and evolution over the last 50 years. This should improve OB researchers’ understanding of the main research approaches, characteristics, advantages and disadvantages.

In recent years, OB research in Taiwan has gradually evolved from an offshoot of U.S. research into an independent entity; from derivative to pioneering. It even leads global research trends in some areas. In line with this development, OB research in Taiwan has gradually expanded its initial strategy of transplantation (etic research) to encompass three main research approaches: a revised cross-cultural approach, an indigenous research approach that focuses on both exploration and exploitation, and the integrated globalized research approach.

Based on the assumption of cultural neutralism,

researchers who pursue the etic approach usually apply Western constructs and theories directly to Taiwanese or Chinese contexts. This allows researchers to validate and re-examine the external validity of Western constructs across contexts. In contrast, the cross-cultural research approach is based on the assumption of cultural relativism. Researchers who take this approach first analyze the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and then shift the focus from the cultural particularity of the original country to the cultural particularity of the host country. In this way, researchers can fine-tune and improve Western theory through comparison. The indigenous research approach is based on the assumption of multi-culturalism. Researchers who take this approach believe that due to cultural particularity, it is impossible to transplant constructs and theories into another cultural context. Therefore, using exploration and exploitation to explain the phenomena of Chinese OB and management should help to supplement or replace the application of Western theories. Finally, the globalized research approach is based on the assumption of cultural integration, which emphasizes the integration of Western and Chinese views with higher cultural values, and the elevation of various theories to the level of global culture. In short, in the last 50 years, OB research in Taiwan has exhibited a trend of creative transformation, composed of follow-up, revision, exploration, exploitation, dialogue, and turnaround.

The four research approaches described above—etic, cross-cultural, indigenous and globalized—can be further evaluated by the perspective of theory development,

including theory building and theory verification. Theory building, or exploration, involves the creation and early development of theory. Theory verification, or exploitation, involves the validation and re-examination of theory. Of the four research approaches, the indigenous and globalized approaches are considered to make the greatest theoretical contribution. Cross-cultural research makes less contribution to theory, and etic research makes the least. Nonetheless, following the trend of engaged indigenous scholarship (Van de Ven, Meyer, & Jing, 2018), there is still much room for improvement in all of the research approaches mentioned above. Researchers should not only strengthen the contextualization emphasized by the indigenous approach, but also pay attention to research engagement. “Engagement” refers to the discussion of relevant issues based on the perspectives of multiple stakeholders (such as academic communities, practitioners, and policy makers), enabling the research results to solve the problems or meet the needs of stakeholders. This idea also reflects the expansion of the scientist-practitioner model. In addition to serving the academic community, OB researchers have to solve practical problems for practitioners and policy makers. Therefore, knowledge creation needs to take into account the views of stakeholders and incorporate them into problem formulation, theory building, research design, and problem solving (Van de Ven, 2007). As a result, theory contribution can not only enhance academics’ substantive development, but also offer illuminating practical and theoretical insights for stakeholders.