

Current paradigms in the international management field: An author co-citation analysis

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Abstract

Although many papers have aimed at describing the evolution of the International Management (IM) field, most of them have applied a subjective approach. Instead of trying to establish the most current research lines or interests, this study investigates the intellectual structure that serves as a basis for the IM research. To achieve this aim, we try to identify the main research trends used in the most relevant IM journals. By means of the co-citation analysis, we analyze the articles published in five top journals from 1997 to 2000, identifying the main trends and analyzing their dissemination within those journals.

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1. Introduction

Since all researches can be cyclical, any field of study needs to take an occasional step back and ponder on how the research area is actually composed (Daniels, 1991). This interest in analyzing and identifying the different research trends in the International Management Field (IM) can be confirmed by the periodical publication of works that reflect on the delimitation of this area (Boddewyn, 1999; DuBois & Reeb, 2000; Martinez & Toyne, 2000) and the analysis of the different subject matters that research tends to

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focus on (Boddewyn & Iyer, 1999; Contractor, 2000; Morrison & Inkpen, 1991; Ricks, 1985; Ricks, Toyne, & Martínez, 1990; Toyne, 1989; Werner, 2002). This type of analysis can be carried out from two approaches. First, the subjective approach based on a qualitative analysis of the literature, starting from the researcher's interpretation. Second, the objective approach is based on bibliographical analysis and quantitative in nature. Both approaches have their pros and cons, and therefore must be construed as complementary approaches to understand the structure of any field of study. In the case of the IM Field, however, we only find researches of the first type (Inkpen & Beamish, 1994; Lu, 2003; Peng, Lu, Shenkar, & Wang, 2001; Werner, 2002; Werner & Brouthers, 2002; Wright & Ricks, 1994). This is an important limitation to understand the real status of the IM field, as it makes it difficult to compare the different proposals and, more importantly, it makes the description of what the field is and the prescription of what it should be to appear melted.

For this reason, the study proposes the use of an objective rather than subjective criterion to identify the main paradigms within the field of IM, by means of the Author Co-citation Analysis—ACA—(Garfield, 1963; Small, 1974). This method, based on bibliometric analyses, has been widely used to identify the structure of knowledge in different fields of study (Acedo et al., 2001; Culnan, 1986; Knight, Hult, & Bashaw, 2000; Pilkington & Liston-Heyes, 1999). Basically, the ACA assumes that both journal articles and books are the sources that contain the knowledge making up a field of study. The ACA methodology analyzes the bibliographic references cited in research documents, as an indicator of the sources of information used and the ideas or approaches connected or integrated in their work (Culnan, 1986; Garfield, 1963). With this methodology, our study aims at identifying the structure of the most important contributions to the field of International Management. This structure shows the organization of the different research paradigms and whether or not these are linked together. This work provides a systematic approach to the identification and organization of the theories that can be found in the research works published in the most relevant IM-related journals. This kind of analysis provides a useful tool for the study of possible 'research holes' and the orientation of future research lines. Finally, this article also aims at being a quick reference that allows new researchers to become familiar with this field of study. The structure of this paper is as follows: First of all, some of the most relevant contributions to IM as a field of study are described. Second, we briefly discuss the foundations for the ACA method and explain how it works. Later on, we show in detail the application of the ACA to the IM field. The results are analyzed in the following section, and we finish by presenting our main conclusions and future lines of research suggested by the discussion of the results.

2. The analysis of international management as a field of study

According to the paradigm concept (Kuhn, 1962), the study of organizations is multiparadigmatic (Fabian, 2000), with the paradigms being incommensurable (Burrell, 1999; Clarke & Clegg, 2000). Consequently, multiple paradigm classifications have been proposed for the discipline of management (Clegg, Hardy, & Nord, 1996; Fabian, 2000; Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999). Similarly, it is reasonable to think that other

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