

DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION: MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN IRELAND AT THE START OF A NEW MILLENNIUM

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Introduction

This volume of *Irish Business and Administrative Research (IBAR)* represents a very significant development in management research in Ireland. Based on the selected best papers from the 1999 Irish Academy of Management Conference, held at the University of Limerick, this volume represents an effective microcosm of the diversity and nature of management research in Ireland. Before delving into the substantive content of this volume, it may be useful to remind ourselves of the recent roots of the IAM and its contribution to management research and teaching in Ireland.

The Irish Academy of Management

The idea for an Irish Academy of Management (IAM) was formed in 1996 by Jim Walsh, who met Kathy Monks and Richard Harrison to discuss how such an organisation might be established. They were soon joined by colleagues from a range of third-level institutions in Ireland interested in participating in this venture. IAM is now the leading professional association for management studies research and education in Ireland. The overall aim of the IAM is to promote the advancement of research, knowledge and education in the field of organisation and management studies and, to this end, the academy has the following objectives:

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- To build wider appreciation and acceptance of the theory and practice of management;
- To further the development of management education;
- To provide opportunities for researchers to collaborate within and across the sub-area specialities of management;
- To encourage presentation and publication of scholarly research.

The fledgling IAM held initial conferences at University College Cork (1996), hosted by Dr Jim Walsh; and Dublin City University (1997), hosted by Dr Kathy Monks. However, the formal inauguration of the Association and Annual Conference did not occur until 1998 when the first "official" IAM Conference took place at the National University of Ireland, Galway, hosted by Dr Leo Smyth. This meeting also adopted the formal IAM Constitution and witnessed the formal election of officers.

Limerick 99 was, thus, the second formal IAM Conference. This event had the largest attendance to date with 152 registered delegates. Almost every University and Institute of Technology in Ireland was represented, along with scholars from eighteen British, four Australian, three US, two New Zealand, and two "other" European Universities. In all, over 90 research papers were selected for the programme after going through a rigorous peer review process in which over 40 reviewers participated. As can be gleaned from the selected best papers in this volume, the range of papers presented at the conference was extremely diverse and covered a variety of management areas, including business policy/strategy, marketing, information technology, public policy/government, accounting, finance, human resource management, industrial relations, organisation behaviour, logistics and operations management. The 2000 Conference will take place at the Dublin Institute of Technology on September 7th and 8th and, given the current growth curve of the IAM, we can anticipate a very large number of delegates and papers.

The Role of *IBAR*

Given the IAM's central aim of advancing research, knowledge, and education in the field of organisation and management studies, a clear priority is the promotion and dissemination of high quality research on all aspects of management studies in Ireland. To this end, the role of a high quality journal is clearly critical. *IBAR* has a long and proud

tradition as Ireland's leading business journal for both academics and practitioners. It is thus appropriate that the Academy views *IBAR* as its key vehicle for disseminating the fruits of its work to a wider audience. This volume — the first issue of *IBAR* as the official Journal of the Irish Academy of Management — marks a major step in this process and we, as guest editors of this special edition, are honoured to be part of this development.

Current Management Research in Ireland: Selected Papers from IAM 99

The changes occurring in the business environment of the late 1980s and through the 1990s are expected to continue into the twenty-first century. The increasing globalisation of product markets, rapid technological/digital advancements and the emergence of new forms of organisation have all resulted in complex, dynamic environments, a consequence now accepted as fact by practitioners, policy makers and academics alike (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 1997; Handscombe and Norman, 1993). The list of skill and competence requirements for tomorrow's managers is therefore growing and they are being forced to adapt their skills to continue to enhance corporate performance and efficiency and secure the long-term future of the organisation in spite of all the uncertainties in this post-modernist order (Baden-Fuller and Stopford, 1992). As organisations have changed, so also has society and academic researchers can play a critically significant role in analysing and commenting on the nature and implications of business changes for various aspects of people's lives, both within and outside the workplace. In particular, they can critically evaluate developments in the business world and evaluate their efficacy on a number of dimensions, not just those relating to the "bottom line".

There is thus an important synergy between research and business whereby good theory can be built partly on practical problems in business, and good business can be built partly on applications of current theory (Williams, 1996). However, some would argue that management research needs to critically re-examine its relationship with management practice. If theory is to be made relevant to the world of practice, new methods must be found for formulating, validating and using knowledge (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). It is our hope that the work of the IAM and, particularly, our annual conference, can act as a vehicle through which we can harness this knowledge, give it a focus and draw out the potential it has to application.

Following a peer review process, a total of 94 research papers were selected for presentation at the IAM 99 conference programme. While some of our academic questions pursued in the conference were predictable and the methods conventional, others were considerably less so, and the breadth of coverage of topics reflected a surprising use of extant intellectual tools. The breadth of coverage also pointed to that striking feature on which there is consensus within the discipline: that management research has no single agreed ontological or epistemological paradigm, a conclusion which Tranfield and Starkey (1998) take to mean that management manifests "soft" properties.

After a second review stage, a total of nine papers were selected for this special edition of *Irish Business and Administrative Research*. At this final review stage, referees were advised to identify papers which made a demonstrable contribution to existing knowledge by developing new theoretical models or conceptual understandings, or by contributing new empirical research/data. We were also keen to identify papers which focused on areas of particular interest in the Irish context and to maintain a good spread of disciplines/areas. It should be noted, at this stage, that the IAM Conference in 1999 had a large number of papers which focused on human resource development, knowledge management/learning and related areas. As a result, a special edition of the *Journal of European Training and Development* will be dedicated to selected best papers on these themes. Our volume consequently excludes papers on this theme. However, it is a significant development and indeed credit for the IAM that special editions of two leading journals have been dedicated exclusively to the papers presented at IAM 99.

The Selected Papers

As our title reveals, the guest editors for the special issue were impressed by the diversity and richness of the rapidly growing field of management research and have attempted to capture some of the flavour of that variation in this issue. Previous IAM conferences have utilised a theme approach in attracting papers, and a conscious decision was taken by the UL hosts of IAM 99 that no theme would be signalled, as they were keen to attract as wide a range of papers and methodologies as possible. Whether coincidental or otherwise, the decision resulted in the attraction of the largest and most diverse number of papers to date. The papers published here cover both a

wide range of vital economic and social issues and span the research methodology field.

Jeanette Cleveland and her colleagues examine the HRM practices and behaviour of US-owned multinational companies (MNCs) in Europe. They test the hypothesis that US-owned MNCs can be distinguished from their European counterparts in terms of their HRM practices and provide an assessment of international differences in HR practices, raising a number of insightful questions as to the wide variations found across the sample population.

Brian Fynes, Seán de Búrca, Teresa Brannick and Liam Glynn tackle the theme of "quality practices, quality performance and business performance". The objective of their paper is to develop and test an "integrated model" of quality practices, quality performance, manufacturing performance and business performance and, in so doing, address the question: does the concept of "trade-offs" or the concept of world class manufacturing apply in manufacturing industry? The paper finds that the notion of world class manufacturing (and associated quality implications), "often described as a utopian state", may in fact be attainable.

Bargained corporatist or social partnership arrangements involving employers, trade unions and government have continuously operated in Ireland since 1987 to this year. While we have heard much from the main actors in these partnership deals, particularly from government, employer bodies and trade unions, there have been few independent evaluations of the perceptions of workers or trade union representatives at workplace level. **Daryl D'Art and Tom Turner's** paper provides some unique insights into one of these critical constituencies, namely "rank and file" trade union members. Drawing on a survey of members of one general union, the authors detail their perceptions regarding the outcome of these agreements and how they appear to have affected their union at national and workplace level.

Kevin Hannigan addresses the role of MNCs but in an exclusively Irish context. His paper provides an interesting overview of the issues arising from an annual survey of multinational companies (MNCs) operating in Ireland and asks the question: how important is the Irish economy to those firms which inhabit it? His tentative findings suggest that the performance of the MNC sector may be "more independent of the economy than is often supposed". He argues that this conclusion is in line with the fact that MNCs performed satisfactorily earlier during periods of poor economic performance and increase in foreign direct

investment in the early 1990s preceded the high growth and competitive gains of recent years.

Transport costs in the Irish food industry are the subject of a paper by **Maeve Henchion**. She outlines both the importance of the Irish food industry and the critical role of transport for that sector. She also provides an overview of the challenges facing food transportation in Ireland and suggests some lessons based on evidence from the UK context. The paper concludes with some comments on future developments with respect to transport requirements and costs.

Mike Moroney, in his paper, provides a detailed examination of strategy evaluation. His paper is both noteworthy and novel, representing as it does a fresh look at the area of strategy evaluation. It is argued that despite its importance, evaluation of strategy is underappreciated and under-researched and is an area in which guidelines for practice are not well developed. Here the author seeks to derive viable hypotheses in the context of presenting an updated paradigm for strategy evaluation, incorporating criteria, conditions and tools.

Trevor Morrow's paper addresses the problematic area of "strategic human resource management", and provides interesting insights on its manifestations in practice, specifically in Northern Ireland's clothing industry. Using survey data from a sample of 69 companies and a small number of supplementary case studies, the overall findings presented by the author appear generally positive. Trevor's paper was joint winner of the "best postgraduate paper" award at IAM 99. Edel Conway of Dublin City University was the other award winner (her paper was entitled "HRM Practices and Employee Commitment: An Empirical Analysis of Employees within the Financial Services").

Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh's paper addresses the issue of gender differences in the accounting field. It particularly focuses on men and women as users of financial statements. Gender differences in perceptions of, and reactions to, uncertainty are examined. It develops a framework within which the uncertain context of financial statements is disclosed and also outlines an experimental approach to the examination of gender effects on judgement and confidence in that accounting setting. The paper concludes by discussing the potential implications of the research for the development of a discipline such as accounting, which has historically been male-dominated but which is attracting increasing numbers of women.

Joe Wallace and Conor McDonnell consider the institutional provisions of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 in operation and seek to establish the general effectiveness of these provisions. They find that

the most significant effect of the institutional changes brought about by the 1990 Act is a higher level of settlements being reached at conciliation. This result aside, their findings suggest that the objectives underlying the institutional provisions of the 1990 Act have either not been achieved or that any improvements cannot be attributed to the Act. They argue that the weight of evidence points to the continuation of trends already in train prior to the introduction of the Act.

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