

# INTRODUCTION

Why is change management in universities, but also in other organisations as deciding over an elephant? The reason is simple! We all have heard of an old Indian fable of the blind men and an elephant, where six blind men who have never seen an actual elephant have to explain what an elephant is merely by touching one part of the animal. Their partial experience or perspective results in claiming that an elephant is like a wall (a man who touched a side of an elephant) or a snake (a man who touched the trunk of an elephant) and so on. Often change initiatives tend to be managed in a same way – different parties tend to gain access to different perspectives. The objective of this book is to show how we could overcome such narrowness.

This book is structured over three interconnected approaches: multiparadigm review (drawing an elephant), multiparadigm research (deciding over an elephant) and metaparadigm theory building (seeing an elephant). First of the mentioned chapters will draw a multiparadigm review on a specific organisational matter – organisational control. Much of the management literature tends to be rather sterile

in terms of appreciating complexity and conflicting perspectives. But let's start from the harsh facts:

*There were about 28 100 active scholarly peer-reviewed English-language journals in late 2014 (plus a further 6 450 non-English-language journals), collectively publishing about 2.5 million articles a year. (Ware & Mabe, 2015, p. 6)*

That said, we are often faced with a need to navigate in existing enormous stock of literature. What I have noticed at least in management literature – since the end of the 1970s, after every decade or so there is a small wave of academic writings that tend to tidy up rather messy piles of management treatises out there. Burrell and Morgan in 1979 signposted the framework of sociological paradigms; in 1991, Hassard applied their framework to explore how the work in a Fire Service is organised; in 1997, Hatch (later editions with Cunliffe) structured organisation theory around modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives; in 1999, Lewis and Grimes showed how to build novel theory from multiple paradigms and so on. I claim that considering the rate of expansion of academic writings, there is a cyclical need for such kind of structuring in organisation studies.

Born (1943, p. 44), the Nobel Prize winner in physics in 1954, once reflected how 'there is no philosophical high-road in science, with epistemological signposts'. Such a remark makes a clear statement how science should never be orthodox, where scientists just need to follow the pre-determined signposts to reach the pre-supposed solutions. Yet for a long time in the history of science, it is what has been practiced. For a long time, basic assumptions from the natural sciences were merely transformed and adapted into the practice of social sciences without any reflection over the mismatch between the object of study and respective scientific practices.

Rosenberg (2005) has captured the essence of every scientific activity, seeing science as a response to our need to understand the world. Similarly, in organisation science, in our attempt to understand the nature of a certain organisational aspect it is impossible to leave out the groundings of our notions of how the world is and what can be known about it. Therefore, Hazlett, McAdam, and Gallagher (2005, p. 33) have stated the scientific community 'is characterised by the unified acceptance of a belief system framework (the paradigm) that guides the members in doing what they do'.

This book will start by reminding the usefulness of acknowledging paradigms or perspectives. For this, I will make practical use of philosophy of science. In the simplest terms, philosophy can be defined as a way of 'seeing' the world in general or specifically, to conceive one's own subject matter. Overall, philosophy of science as 'the study of systematic processes through which human beings attempt to understand the world' has the power to improve our understanding of research efforts also in the study of organisations (Behling, 1978, p. 193). This being so, philosophy of science seeks to bring forward the prescriptions or rules that ought to accompany a proper argument in a scholarly communication. It will take its point of departure from the works of Kuhn (1962, 1970, 1982), who literally set the scene for reflecting on what scientists do and how scientific knowledge is being developed. Notions such as 'paradigm' and 'incommensurability' between paradigms are notions popularised by Kuhn and spread around across different scientific disciplines. The mentioned shift in understanding emerged when scientists started to take notice of how science, as such, is not a homogeneous field of activities and interests.

Organisation studies, like any other field, are 'paradigmatically anchored' (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 585). In fact, the mentioned authors note (p. 586) that for a long time

organisation studies have been dominated by the modernist assumption that the nature of organisational phenomena is 'out there', waiting to be studied, which means that organisational scientists tend to operate using a predominantly deductive approach to theory building, setting up hypotheses appropriate for the organisational world and in the end, testing them against hypothesis-driven data through statistical analyses. Hence, it becomes clear how such dominating paradigms can act as orthodoxies in organisation science (Morgan, 1980) and to be situated in a particular paradigm means to look at the world in a particular way (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The motivation for the research on control emerges from Eilon (1971, p. 1), who highlights that 'decision making and problems of management are not an invention of our present age; they have always been, and will always remain, part of human experience', since it is in human nature to manage one's environment and seek to control the prospects of the future. Hence, control phenomenon is inevitably present in every organised activity. Considering all that was mentioned above, this book will seek to fill the gap of misrepresentation of organisational control in management studies. As such, it is put forward the claim that organisational control in a natural organisational environment most often reflects situations of complexity and paradox managing, yet scholarly literature is remarkably overbalanced towards single-paradigm strategies. In addition, although the term 'control' has been used in academic spheres across the world, it has rarely been systematically conceptualised. What can be witnessed in literature is that control is often seen as 'a collection of separate and specialist functions' (Beer, 1995, p. 382). It is a sad fact that while most management problems today involve multilevel phenomena, most management research in academic literature often still uses a single level of analysis (Hitt, Beamish,

Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007, p. 1385). Koontz has described the situation as ‘the management theory jungle’, or even ‘confused and destructive jungle warfare’, which to a large extent is caused by the unwillingness or perhaps even inability of management theorists to understand each other (1961, pp. 185, 175). Hence, the theoretical focus of this book is to uncover how the parts of single perspectives about control in organisation work together to explain the diversity of the control phenomenon itself.

In order to achieve the stated end, different conceptualisations of organisational control will be clustered around three paradigms: modern,<sup>1</sup> symbolic<sup>2</sup> and postmodern.<sup>3</sup> The choice of labels attached to a paradigm follows terms most used in scholarly literature and in textbooks. For example, a well-known book in organisation studies by Hatch and Cunliffe focuses on modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives (1997/2013). Every single paradigm discussed above can be characterised through three grounding assumptions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. The set of grounding assumptions about the nature of a certain phenomenon (ontology) always determine and embody a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge (epistemology) we might gain, and methods to obtain knowledge (methodology) about the respective phenomenon (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 491). Such an approach allows for a more holistic image of organisational control than an attempt to list all the single (and often competing) theories one by one.

In this book, a paradigm will be defined as a set of coherent philosophical assumptions that manifest in recognised scientific achievements and influence acknowledged practices of problem-solutions. This being so, a paradigm allows the encapsulation of all the single theories of organisational control that share the same set of root assumptions, in addition to approving similar ways of thinking about and approaching

one's subject matter. In sum, Chapter 1 will 'draw an elephant' by pulling together different perspectives on organisational control.

Chapter 2 applies the paradigms in practice – I will engage in empirical research in higher education institution management as to prove how practical the multiparadigm approach can be. University management was chosen as the research topic as during the past decades, universities as organisations have gone through remarkable changes that are still ongoing. The shift from elite education to mass education has brought great changes to the way universities work today, some even referring to the reborn Fordist style of 'McUniversities', where comparability and standardisation at all levels has become the core of higher education institution management (Parker & Jary, 1995). With increasing participation numbers from students, which is often not proportionally supported by an increase in financing, it has brought new practices into university management. Gioia and Thomas (1996, p. 370) have described how the higher education arena today looks increasingly like a competitive marketplace, forcing universities to take up management practices that have been (and still are) relatively unfamiliar to the academic mindset. 'Performance management', 'managerialism' and 'entrepreneurialism' are just some of the new forces that are contributing to the transformation of universities today and have resulted higher education functioning more and more like an industry (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2008, p. 450) and universities are forced to 'think and act' like business organisations.

This book will address the implementation of a major management reform (with the aim of being better prepared for the future changes in the higher education arena) in a large and public university, namely the University of Tartu has to face the above-mentioned pressures present in higher

education in general; however, with an academic heritage of almost 400 years, obligations towards its history can make any major change a sensitive issue. It is during the change implementation processes when different facets of organisational control start to emerge and with this in mind, universities tend to be an interesting research site. Traditional tensions between the academic and the administrative communities, the relatively autonomous power of single units and faculties, the interests of the external parties and funding institutions (including ministries) all play a part in key decision-making. As such, using an old university as a research site is also relevant at the international level, since long-established universities are expected to be conservative, yet from another aspect they should strive for innovation and change for the sake of society.

Universities are important research objects with respect to organisational control for several reasons. First, it is obvious that university management has the ability and bears an obligation to shape the quality of higher education of the respective country. Second, as universities in many countries are one of the oldest organisations, some having history and traditions back to the Middle Ages, they carry a heavy ‘baggage of preset arrangements’ (e.g. gap between the so-called academic and practical rigour) that make controlling them in the present-day environment rather challenging. Third, universities tend to be large-scale organisations, thus the complexity of organisational control behind them is beyond the common sense understanding. The fact how every large change initiative reflects a clash of different perspectives is also the reason why the Chapter 2 is conceptualised as ‘deciding over an elephant’.

Chapter 3 will bring us closer to ‘seeing an elephant’. I will use the insights from Chapters 1 and 2 to craft a logical framework that helps to understand the conflicting forces that

control change initiatives, namely, the interaction between sensemaking, sensegiving, sensekeeping and sensebreaking. The framework or conceptual schema offered at the end of the book truly sets out a proposition that one should not neglect the value of seeing multiple perspectives.

## NOTES

1. Some authors prefer to address the notion ‘modern paradigm’ (e.g. Hatch & Cunliffe, 1997/2013), and some speak of the ‘functionalist paradigm’ (e.g. Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Since both refer to the same phenomenon, in this book the notion of modern paradigm will be used.
2. In a similar vein to the above footnote, as some authors prefer to address the notion ‘symbolic paradigm’ (e.g. Hatch & Cunliffe, 1997/2013), and some speak of the ‘interpretive paradigm’ (e.g. Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Duberley, Johnson, & Cassell, 2012), the notion of symbolic paradigm is employed.
3. Although also the postmodern label has different synonyms, still in the literature the ‘postmodern’ label can be regarded as the most common.