

Writing Impactful Research' Philosophy lunched



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The Research and Publication Unit of the Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL), in collaboration with the Emerald Publishing and College of Healthcare Management and Economics, Gulf Medical University, Ajman, UAE, had launched a four-month research course on “Writing Impactful Research” on 22nd April 2021.

The third virtual session in this series was hosted on May 6, 2021 with the participation of a large number of attendees. It began with a welcome address by Dr. Thilini Gamage, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, with the presence of Professor Athula Gnanapala, Dean, Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Dr. Jayantha Dewasiri, Senior Lecturer, Sabaragamuwa University/Brand Ambassador, Emerald Publishing - South Asia, Miss. Sangeeta Menon, Publishing Relationship Manager, Emerald Publishing, Prof. Sudhir Rana, College of Healthcare Management and Economics, Gulf Medical University, and Miss. Disha Lakhnopal, Regional Marketing Manager, Emerald Publishing.

The Guest Speakers for this session were Prof. Arosha Adikaram and Professor Tharusha Gooneratne from the Faculty of Management & Finance, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Both Professor Adikaram and Professor Gooneratne have impressive publication records and have received awards in recognition of their research excellence locally and internationally. The topic of the session was “Philosophy of Research”. The two guest speakers made a significant contribution by sharing their understanding and learnings on research philosophy. While research philosophy is rather difficult to understand and is often a complex aspect of research, the speakers ensured to make their explanations as simple as possible drawing from everyday examples and their research work.

Prof. Adikaram and Professor Gooneratne went on to explain what philosophy is and why understanding research philosophy is important, illuminating their own world views which has influenced the kind of research they do and how they go about doing their research. Accordingly, they noted that understanding research philosophies and paradigms are essential in carrying out a research, as consciously or unconsciously, at every stage of a research, a researcher makes philosophical assumptions, which will underpin the research strategy and the methods selected as

part of that strategy, including the means to data collection and analysis as well as write up. They emphasised the need for such internal consistency and coherence where all elements of the research fit together. Moving to the core of the session, the two speakers explained with practical examples and visual illustrations, the 'ologies'. i.e. ontology, epistemology, and methodology, which are terms that one often encounters in a discussion about philosophy of research.

The two speakers explained to the audience how a research is based on a set of assumptions and underpinning philosophical beliefs about the social world/reality (ontology), nature of knowledge (epistemology), how knowledge should be gathered (methodology). They elaborated that ontology is the assumptions one holds about the world, the truth, the nature of reality, and its existence. i.e., whether social entities should be perceived as objective or subjective entities. At one end, is the belief that there is an objective reality out there, independent of the individual. At the other end, is the belief that there are multiple subjective realities. Similarly, they noted that epistemology is the assumptions related to the nature, origin, limits, and acquisition of knowledge. One view (held by positivist researchers) is that knowledge is observable, measurable, generalisable, and that research should be carried out in an objective manner. The other view (held by anti-positivist researchers) is that knowledge is not measurable, not generalisable and that multiple realities need to be subjectively identified. The speakers also cautioned the audience that these terms have profound meaning, and that methodological decisions stem from philosophical assumptions.

As the session progressed, Prof. Adikaram and Professor Gooneratne elaborated how based on the different ontological, epistemological and methodological (research philosophical) assumptions, a research can be founded on a specific research paradigm, which will guide the research process and help in plotting the route to the research. While noting that numerous scholars have expressed various insights on paradigms, for illustration, they drew on the well-known classification presented by Burrell and Morgan (1979) in their work, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. Moving on, they differentiated between common paradigms, such as positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, social constructivism and pragmatism.

In doing so, they offered an overview of the paradigms, moving through core ontological, epistemological assumptions underpinning each of them and the accompanying methodology. For further clarity, they drew examples from their own publications and publications of their colleagues.

This session was a reminder to all, that from the outset you need to understand where and why your study is located from a philosophical stance, explicitly state it and be able to defend your position strongly. The two speakers also emphasised that one needs to be aware of the alternative philosophical underpinnings and that there is no right or wrong paradigm. More importantly, it was highlighted that a researcher can ground his/her inquiry in a suitable paradigm depending on the nature of the study (research problem, questions, objectives), having consistency with the underlying philosophical assumptions and the research paradigm, in all the choices regarding the research, such as theory, methodology and analysis. Offering a word of caution, they reiterated that different researchers interchangeably use the terms, philosophy and paradigms,

methodology and approach/strategy, and that the distinctions between them may appear blurred. They suggested references as further readings for the audience.

For the Q&A session at the end of the presentation, the two speakers were joined by programme coordinators, Dr. Jayantha Dewasiri, (Brand Ambassador- Emerald Publishing), Prof. Sudhir Rana (Gulf Medical University) and Miss Sangeeta Menon (Publishing Relationship Manager, Emerald - India). The panel addressed various queries posed by the audience from the perspective of research scholar, editor, and publisher, respectively. This thought-provoking session ended with a thanking note delivered by Prof. Moon Moon Haque, College of Healthcare Management and Economics, Gulf Medical University, Ajman, UAE.