ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH’S EFFICACY IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT:
Business for success requires information for planning, creating, allotting resources etc. There are many approaches which can be used by business organisations to collect information. To have a clear understanding of the customers’ ethnographic research method, an anthropological approach can be used effectively. The method has its flexibility to collect information on various stakeholders in business organisations. Companies can develop strategies for their future with information and enhance their productivity. In a formal environment, collecting information becomes difficult. However, the ethnographic techniques allow the researcher to observe the people in their environment. Many business organisations have comprehended the importance of ethnographic research. To cite a few organisations, Intel makes use of ethnographic observation for planning its strategies. The LEGO group of companies has faced a major setback in their business. They selected an anthropologist to observe their customers’ needs. The approach helped them to fix their gaps in their products used by kids and teens. Ethnographic observations have become vital and LEGO changed its strategies. In this research article the authors have observed the use of an ethnographic approach in business organisations. The authors have made an intensive search of various literature available on this subject of interest. The content was critically examined and inferences were drawn. The findings highlight the efficacy of the ethnographic approach in business management. The main highlights of the study are business management that requires information from various stakeholders. The ethnographic approach can unveil things which are not usually articulated by the stakeholders. It has the power to apprehend visual and emotional behaviour of the consumers, behaviors of different stakeholders, product users’ behavior, test marketing exercises, the real-life behaviour and practice of the consumers etc.

Key words: Ethnographic Approach, Business Management, Behavior, Efficacy.

INTRODUCTION
Business management has its objectives to achieve its goals and success. Management plays a strong role in the development and prosperity of organisations. Some of the objectives of the management are to maximize the utilization of their resources, to increase the quality of their products, progress and development of the businesses, to ensure good supply chain, talent acquisition, research and development, to ensure good performance of the businesses, strategizing for future etc. In particular, management tries its best to make the business productive and execute things smoothly.

Research and development is given importance by the management as it gives information for planning, promoting, allotting resources etc. The business industry adopts various kinds of research types to collect information. Some examples are surveys, evaluations, social audit, performance assessment, quick assessment studies etc. In business research, the details of all the business areas are studied and it includes their market and their consumers. It is mainly conducted to increase the profit of their business. Many key areas of interest in Business Management can be studied and information obtained should be useful for taking key decisions.

There are many benefits to business research and management. It helps businesses to relate with their customers in the right way, map the threats in the markets, minimize the risk in their operation, move towards better market position and innovate. Ritesh Patil, Mobisoft Infotech's co-founder, states that business research is key for growing the market share and revenue of the company. The research information helps to minimize failure and
build the business. Basically, business and management research are applied research which inquires methodically the various factors to resolve business problems and helps to feed information to the management.

In the present research paper, the authors have studied various literature available in business management research and have highlighted the efficacy of ethnographic research approach in business management research. Ethnography, which means study of a community, is a research tool of anthropologists. They use the ethnographic method to study human culture, environment, community practices etc. In recent days, ethnographic research methods have been adapted by different stakeholders like health, education and also in business management research.

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

All business organisations have to be concerned about their management. They function around planning, organizing, setting the human resources, directing and controlling. In business management, certain tools are used for organisations’ strategic planning and for developing policies. The execution plans and procedures for the guidelines of the organisation are part of business management. Business management helps with managerial actions which are mostly centered on human behaviors. The management principle of the organisation influences human behaviour. Its major focus is on the amalgamation of the individual efforts in the organisation and organizing them towards the expected results of the business. Therefore, management values are executed by the team and group of activities with available resources.

Business management requires systematic knowledge upgradation since it deals with human behaviour on par with the technological development which is required for the organisation. In this context, it is interesting to understand that anthropological methods support knowledge upgradation of business management.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the study from the reviews were as follows

1. To understand the efficacy of ethnographic research information in Business Management and
2. To understand the importance of usefulness of information for Business Management

**ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH APPROACH**

The Ethnographic Research Approach uses qualitative research techniques. The observation research techniques use both non-participant observation and participant observation, followed by flexible key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus group discussions (FGDs).

The study approach does not disturb the activities of the people observed or the phenomenon observed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012) in Moleong. Emzir (2012), states that ethnography is a popular science which has adapted per se according to the time and context. Reeves (2008) states that the main aim of the ethnographic methodology is to document comprehensive information about people, their actions, geographical locations etc. It provides detailed information for the researcher who conducts the study.

The main techniques of the ethnographic approach are transect walks, non-participant observation, participant observation, key informant interviews, mapping, case studies, focus group discussions and In-depth interviews which can be structured or semi structured. To arrive at approximate numbers, the Delphi technique is used. All the techniques are flexible and can be adapted for any setting of research.

**Methodology of the Study**

The authors have reviewed the research articles related to the following subjects: Business Research, Ethnography method used in business research, and the importance of Management of Information Systems in Business management. Intensive search of literature was done to short list suitable articles. After examination of the content of the articles, the authors have conceptualized the importance of ethnographic study method in business management. The following steps were followed by the authors for the critical review.
Review of Literature

Suchitra Mouly and Sankaran (2006) in their study used participant observation method to study the behavior of small businesses. Ethnographic data from a) neighborhood outlets and b) small businesses of government c) privatization was collected. The qualitative survey purported to deliver an inside view of the behaviour of small businesses. Schröder and Steinhoff (2009) have indicated the applicability of Ethnographic Research Tool on customer integration and adaptation of new approaches to manage the Laboratories of Deutsche Telekom. Ethnographic methods in the two cases of customers showed the need for trained personnel and suitable participants for successful observations. The study emphasized observation of different stakeholders. McCuistion (2008) has stated that ethnographic methods-interview and participant observation were used in two companies. Ethnographers and anthropologists were employed by different practitioners to track descriptions and metrics. The study showed the need for consensus about practicing ideas which could create standards for an ethnographer. Harrison-Conwill (2014) in his informal ethnography at corporate workplace has applied anthropological methods to professional life. His idea of understanding the concept of fact could be focused on people and culture. Informal ethnography showed ways of cultural construction which shaped organizations and individuals as actors. Anthropologists could also contribute and direct other fields like social and political territories.

Urban and Koh (2013) in their study state that the ethnographers’ approach is effective in understanding the inner working styles in corporations. Farmer (2012) in his research of cultural anthropology has made the use of anthropological perspectives in the business environment and the two disciplines were considered as complementary. The method of anthropology has generated knowledge in many ways, especially in the business environment. Commerce and economics were closely connected with human culture and wealth became the social prestige, power and social status of human beings. The use of ethnography in the business environment was to understand the employees’ longings, wants and real culture in the company. Navarro et al., (2021) in their article customer relationship management and its impact on innovation have documented that for business management success, customer relationship management has to be taken care of every wellness. They have presented many articles in support of customer relationship management. Minton et al., (2021) in their research have examined the processing capability of the theory of mind. They state that when consumers have a higher theory of mind, they are sceptical of the advertisements and rate the products very low. The ability to understand others' intentions is called the theory of mind. Mind tools, in their article on "What is Business Ethnography" have elaborated on how business ethnography promotes customer engagement while developing the product. They further elaborate on how business ethnography is done and how the findings can be applied to business. Stiner (2016) in his article published in Forbes on "How to use Ethnographic research to help your business" states that ethnographic research in business management points out the specific needs of the business, and identifies the true client. This helps to predict the design of the product. Burt (2019) in his article on "The importance of ethnographic research in product design" has detailed how ethnography has helped in understanding human behaviour. The article has cited the experience of Intel in understanding the buying pattern of their consumers. The research is not a quick method of data collection. Researchers have to keep accumulating information till they get saturated with information. Then they have to spend time on synthesizing, analyzing and
triangulating. Pant and Alberti (1997) in their article have elaborated on the scope of applied anthropology towards business anthropology. They state that the research techniques of anthropology help to solve many business problems. The article documents how ethnographic techniques can descriptively provide analysis of many hidden realities and dynamics in many settings, both formal and informal. It further helps interactive learning while the research is executed. Hamda (1998) in his article states that business anthropology techniques are a boon to business management. The research methods of anthropology help the organisation to understand comprehensively the dynamics of the organisational culture, identify contradictory relationships, reflection and representations of experiences etc.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH APPROACH IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

The central focus of Business Management is to be successful in the business objective. The information system management in the organization helps to get a clear picture of the direction that can be taken by the business and the corresponding actions to be taken. The information can help the management to get an outline of its entire operation, pointers on the staff performance, consumers’ opinion, and business process, understand what can be rolled out in production and launch etc. If the information system in Business Management is very efficient, the organisation's progress is assured. Given this background of importance of information, the process and method of information collection is crucial. Many methods are used by business management for the generation of information. The ethnographic research approach helps business management to obtain information without disturbing the work environment. To be specific, data is generated in natural settings from the different stakeholders of the business.

Ethnographic research techniques can unveil unarticulated needs of the various stakeholders in the business, like consumers, people involved in the supply chain, people in the distribution chain, people involved in marketing, people involved in brand positioning etc. The techniques of ethnography help to build relationships with the stakeholders to get information. It can capture the behaviour and attitudes of the various stakeholders which help the business management to fix things in favor of their future success. It can identify the strengths of competing business organisations etc. In the article by Chai one (2016) "Using Ethnographic Research in Business", the companies’ experience of using ethnographic research is highlighted.

Business organisations appreciate the usefulness of ethnographic research tools. Large companies like Intel and LEGO have used ethnographic methods and have stated that they have understood the strength of the research techniques. Intel Company has hired an anthropologist to conduct ethnographic studies for their company and also trained other researchers in this anthropological tool. The company feels that the research method has helped them understand the customers better, innovate the products, understand the usefulness of the products etc. The LEGO group of companies faced a major problem since their products were not attractive to teens and children. The ethnographic information has helped them redesign and move forward successfully. Anderson (2009) states that ethnographic research has helped companies and the research techniques are useful to observe the behaviour of consumers in their living context. The information educates the company in developing their new product. Harr et al., (2019) in their research have examined the factors which are important for enterprise management’s success. The study findings highlight that information systems have a positive effect on organisational content management. They have documented that it increases the effectiveness, team partnership and compliance. The study is comprehensive and captures the practical implications of enterprise content management systems. Many companies have hired anthropologists for their business management. The list is as follows Citicorp, AT & T, Kodak, Sapient, Hauser Design, Boeing, Motorola, Walt Disney, Microsoft, Hallmark, General Mills, Travel One, Hanseatic group, Manchester Memorial, Palisades Pharmaceuticals, Celanese corporation etc.

It is very important to note that ethnographers who are anthropologists do not have preconceptions, have good oral and written communication, skills to observe and explain the subtleties. They can present complex human behaviour and dynamics in a very simple way. They help to see the larger picture of the present happenings and the future perspectives. In specific, the ethnographic research methods used by anthropologists integrate, synthesizes and analyzes the data obtained.

BENEFITS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

In recent times, the new name which is given to business ethnography is "new core competence". It means that business ethnography gives new insights into business management. Some of them are the information helping to
assess the staff practices, designs of the company’s products, marketing strategies and risk assessment, consumers’ mindset, consumers’ brand preference and understanding the needs of the customers etc.

The routine activities of the organisation make the staff get engrossed in completing their tasks. In this process, the organisation misses observing the various important dynamics which help for better functioning and productivity. If the company has trained researchers in ethnographic skills, they will be helpful in providing information to the management. But only a few companies do believe in this practice. In recent days, many companies have started the practice of doing ethnographic research. The ethnographic researchers have three main skills: empathy, listening and curiosity, which make the research to get entire data of human behavior involved in business management.

**KEY RESEARCH TECHNIQUES USED IN ETHNOGRAPHY APPROACH IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

Different ethnographic techniques are used in business management to study the different stake holders. Some of them are non-participant observation, participant observation, Case studies, Mapping, Delphi techniques, Key informant interviews, In-depth interviews etc. In non-participant observation, the researcher documents the information about the stake holders/practices/environment etc without participating in the activities. The limitation of the study is that the researcher cannot ask anything from the participant if he or she needs more information. In Participant observation methodology, the researcher participates in the key activities of the stake holders to document his observations. In case study methodology, the researcher can understand the behaviour patterns of the individual. The researcher can collect comprehensive information in every single case study. The Delphi technique is used to arrive at conclusions on specific issues. A few examples are an individual’s preference towards a brand, the volume of consumers in a specific area etc. The information is generated from a panel of experts and a multi-layer of information is collected from the experts. Finally, the information is validated by the experts themselves for the final inferences. The methodology unveils the reality inside business management with its flexible approach and sets of observations through different techniques. Therefore, it is not a surprise that many companies are hiring anthropologists in recent days to increase their "new core competence".

**CONCLUSION**

The critical review of various literature available on Business Management and Ethnography in business appreciates the efficacy of the anthropological approach. Research in business settings is usually quantified and presented to the management. The common research schedule of business management will be like social audit, staff performance appraisal, marketing research etc. It is remarkable to understand that the ethnographic approach to business management can provide depth of information which can be used by all the stake holders of the business organisation. Many authors have documented the use of anthropological approach-ethnography for business. However, more in-depth research can be undertaken to explore the ethnographic techniques and their adaptation in the business management context. Many companies have appreciated their anthropologists who have helped them to fix their business issues. The interdisciplinary knowledge exchanged between Business Management and Anthropology is the reason for the birth of the term "new core competence". The "new core competence" of business management becomes powerful to handle its challenges and the competitions around it. All the levels of stake holders are benefitted by the new knowledge.

**REFERENCES**


