Critical Realism in Management Studies

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*Hegel would not have been wrong if he had described
the history of philosophy as that of explicit
idealism and implicit realism (Bhaskar, 1993:308)*

Abstract
In Africa as in other parts of the world critical management research is assuming a lot of significance. There is now a felt need to break away with positivist or empiricist research, which has over years assumed hegemonic status in the philosophy of science. Positivist blind insistence on experimentation and causality as the hallmark of rigorous research is no longer credible and sustainable. One of the apparent problems with the traditional view of research is that it conflates philosophy with methodology and methods. This paper examines a new research paradigm called critical realism. A key component of realism is that it embeds research methods in philosophy, for realism ontology matters. It is argued that realism provides an important metaphysical depth to research. Its theoretical perspective grounded on generative mechanism and stratification and emergence is crucial in explaining contemporary global changes and their impact on organisations. By integrating the macro and the micro domain critical realism offers a new dynamic in the conceptualisation of management where events that we see occurring at the surface level are traced to the deeper unobservable mechanisms, which shape phenomenon. Some weaknesses of critical realism are also discussed, especially its failure to historicise the dialectics of labour and capital.
Keywords *Realism, Structures, Mechanism, Philosophy, Methodology*

Introduction

Before I elaborate on the relevance of realism in management, it is pertinent to address the question that is often asked ⸺ what critical is realism? To answer this question I start from the beginning. That beginning means understanding the main ideas which inform critical realism, in other words, the philosophy. In this paper I argue that there is a fundamental problem with mainstream philosophy. This comes from dualism and reductionism. Philosophy of science is still dominated by theories that mediate the conception of the world through either experience or/and contemplation. The immediate consequence of which is that by and large, contemporary research is bracketed into positivism and idealism. Critical realism was developed as a squeal to the hegemony of dominant philosophy in discourse. In a way its emergence marked what Kuhn (1996) referred to as a paradigm shift in the revolutions of science. The paper is organised as follows. First there is a brief outline of what I see as the philosophical problem in mainstream research. Secondly, I explain the underlying conceptual principles of critical realism. I then give a perspective on the application of realist research in management. Thirdly, drawing from the foregoing, I suggest some of the methodological techniques that are compatible with this philosophy.

Idealism and Positivism

Marx has long showed the problematic of modern philosophy when he said, "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point is to change it" (Marx, cited in Callinicos, 1983). It is important to take Marx enduring quote as the starting point. This is for the simple reason that this phrase still has resonance with contemporary philosophy. Perhaps, much more than it was then when he challenged philosophers to connect the realm of discourse with the real world, which is, situating the abstract within the concrete. For him it was not enough to intellectualise about problems of society. The bottom line was practice.

The last millennium, since the death of Karl Marx, saw philosophy expand widely into many areas, for example from enlightenment to modernism and postmodernism. But this growth could be described as muted because no real advance was made to address Marx's critique. Rather, we have seen the proliferation of various shades of philosophy as Lenin (1972) foresaw. Still, they conveniently avoid the fundamental question of relating thought and reality. It is therefore essential to go back to the genesis of the problem. Engels (1885) identified this central issue, which he said, caused a split amongst philosophers. According to him the source of this divide arose from two things— idealism and materialism. As he put it:

> *The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being. Is our thinking capable of cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality? In philosophical language this question is called the question of the "identity of thinking and being* (Engels, 1885:33).

At the heart of Engels philosophy was the need to define ontology. His concern was that noted philosophers, like Hegel, for instance, collapsed what he called the "real world and thought content", therefore falling into the idealist camp. On the other hand, he appreciated Hume and Kant contributions because they refuted this line of thinking. But he was quick to criticise them for "philosophical agnosticism", as they did not really seek a different approach from idealists. Instead, their solution was an attempt to reconcile the splits by taking a bit of materialism and fusing it with a bit of idealism. Engels explains:

> *The principal feature of the philosophy of Kant is an attempted reconciliation of materialism and idealism, a compromise between the claims of both, a fusion of heterogeneous and contrary philosophic tendencies into one system. When Kant*

admits that something outside of us, − a thing-in-itself⌐ corresponds to our perception he seems to be a materialist. When he, however, declares this thing-in-itself to be unknowable, transcendent, 'trans-intelligible' ⌐ he appears to be an idealist (Engels, 1885:33).

The problem of ontological reductionism in social research comes from a gap in philosophy, methodology and research techniques. Most of the research tends to focus more on empirical investigation and as such give less attention to philosophy. According to Reason and Rowan (1981) it is necessary to integrate these elements as they all interweave into one tapestry. Therefore philosophy deserves to be the anchor because it helps explain the two underlying issues that underpin research, the nature of phenomena (ontology) and the knowledge of investigation (epistemology).

Lawson (1997) suggests the domination of research by methodology come from the assumption that the nature of social reality is known in advance. Hence it is then possible to fit in methods as if it was a matter of choice. This failure to define the ontology or being results in what Lawson calls epistemological reductionism. Accordingly, this gap has serious implications for knowledge generation because it can lead to the application of irrelevant methods because the universe of phenomena has not been clearly defined from the beginning.

Contemporary philosophies of social science are still grappling with the problem of dualism and reductionism even though they don't openly acknowledge that it is a burning question. Examples are positivism and postmodernism. First, positivism does not take as its starting point the nature of phenomena (ontology). Rather, positivism starts from unreflective application of a particular deductive method to whatever phenomena are under investigation (Fleetwood 2004). For example, positivists assume that knowledge is obtained through atomistic events of sense experience. Moreover, it posits that these experiences take the form of regularities from which general propositions emerge. This then forms the basis for prediction and drawing law like statements.

Postmodernism and post structuralism by contrast do take account of ontology and tailor their methods and techniques (epistemology) to suit their worldview. Unfortunately, however, they adopt a wrong ontology by arguing that the world is constituted by phenomena, which is socially constructed. This implies heterogeneous ontology or multiple realities in which we can hardly determine, for instance, between what is right from wrong or true from false, this slip is called judgmental relativism (Sayer, 2000). Hence, the view that, notions like class and gender are

discursive. With this reasoning, postmodernist theory lacks a referent to the social world (Callinicos, 1989). This is serious because it is an attempt to rewrite history by undermining the central role played by workers under capitalism. Fortunately, no amount of imaginings can alter the fact that capitalism presupposes labour. This leaves critical realism as a better philosophical doctrine.

Critical Realism

Critical realism is a new paradigm in the social sciences established over the last few decades by the pioneering work of philosopher, Roy Bhaskar (1978). However, its roots go deeper than that for it draws from the Kantian theory. That legacy is informed by Kant notion of "thing in itself" (Engels, 1885; Collier, 1994; Rees, 1998). Though realists have attempted to build a new theory out of Kant ideas however the problem is that their bricks are still mortared with the Kantian mud:

> *Critical realism thereby break from previous Kantian theories of the philosophy of science by showing that under some conditions models about the world can explore a deeper aspect of reality. (Archer et al. 1998: xi). Yet it is also the case that critical realism still contains residues of a form of Kantianism. This can be seen in the chosen use of the retroductive method of abstraction. Retroduction clearly stresses the necessity of thought to discover underlying realities. In particular it wishes to go beyond how the world appears because such appearance tend to conceal and to distort reality. In a manner reminiscent of Kant, it is believed that only thought at some distance from distorting influence of appearance can explore reality. In this way a type of dualism is theoretically reimposed whereby reality is taken to be hidden behind appearances. Thought can grasp the nature of this reality, but it can only do so through the rational subject. Those causal powers eventually retroduced do not therefore share an internal relationship to the real world through either appearances or experience* (Sayers, 1985: 29- 31, quoted in Roberts, 2002).

In fact, Bhaskar himself acknowledged this in their discussion with Callinicos (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003). Perhaps this Kantian legacy has become more pronounced in Bhaskar's recent works, notably in his latest and controversial book 'From East to West' (see Bhaskar 2000).

That said however, in recent years, critical realist paradigm has affirmed its position as an alternative in the social sciences. It is now a growing intellectual movement applied in areas such

as education, management, economics, sociology, arts and other disciplines. Unlike positivism, critical realism does take as its starting place the nature of the phenomena under investigation and then attempt to tailor their methods to suit. Unlike most postmodernists and poststructuralists, the ontological commitments of critical realism are, arguably, correct. Critical realists are ontologically committed to the existence of both of a (non-empty) extra discursive dimension and a discursive realm. Moreover, critical realism is far more pluralistic in its epistemology as it rules very little out apriori and so can accommodate several methods and techniques (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000).

A realist paradigm argues that it is imperative to define ontology before we can proceed to epistemology. According to Outhwaite (1987) the important question is what must the world be like in order for science to be possible. The premise to this must essentially start from the view that, the world must exist independently from what ever we think about it. Otherwise if the world was already knowable there will be no need for science. As Marx (1981: 956) explained this succinctly, 'all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and essence of things directly coincided'.

It is this problem that still makes Marx echo reverberate "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point is to change it". For Marx philosophers have to do more than just interpreting the world. Today philosophy has not moved any further. In spite of the fact that large chunks of knowledge has been generated much of this is still geared at maintaining the status quo than changing it. However, with the advent of critical social theory things are more promising. Critical realist interventions have helped facilitate this by arguing for an ontological alternative compatible with materialism (Fleetwood, 2002), thus departing from mainstream reductionist philosophy that conflates thinking and reality.

Critical realism takes an entirely different understanding to the way we see the world. This difference stems from its claim about reality —— that the world exists independent from our knowledge of it. Sayer (2000) suggests the basis of this belief come from the fallibility of our knowledge. We make ideas about the nature of our world. And this sometimes can be true but sometimes it turns out that our view was incorrect. As it was the case when at some point we

thought the earth was flat but this was disproved because the world remains independent from thought. When we later realised that in fact the earth was round, its landscape did not change in line with our whims. It remained what it was, and so shall it be when in case in future we might change our opinion again. Thus the realist contention of reality existing regardless of our knowledge of it remains valid. What does this have to do with research? Previously, both the natural and social research was dominated by scientism (Chambers 1992). The notion that it is the experiences and regularity that are, important in scientific investigation rather than abstraction and irregularity.

Based on the Humean law, the positivist conception of science assumes that science occurs under closed conditions, which follow constant conjunction of events. For example, whenever A then B, hence A is caused by B (Collier, 1994), but such a view has been found to be problematic to studying science because under conditions of closure scientific activity would be almost impossible to carry out. This is why it becomes necessary for creating an environment where certain things are held under closed conditions (experiments) so that causal laws can be identified (Bhaskar, 1978; Tsoukas, 1989). Thus it could be argued that both the natural and social worlds are open systems.

According to Harre (1981) the main foundation of the critical realist perspective lies in content or the deep (See table 1). In other words, to understand the substance, a researcher has to transcend the realm of experience in order to account for the presence of the unobserved entities. As Sayer (2000) puts it, 'observed things may make us feel more confident about what we think exists but what is observed may have little to do with what exists, as the latter does not depend entirely on the former'. However, it is from observations that critical realism expands the analysis of causation. Rather than rely on the Humean causality of constant conjunction of events and regularity as a basis for understanding reality. A realist approach uses observation not as an end rather as means to shed light on what underlies experienced events. This is explained through the principle of causal mechanisms.

According to this theory, objects or structures (transitive and intransitive) have powers, which are independent from the events they generate. To ascribe powers to objects is to recognise that

they (objects) have capacities or potentials that enable them to perform certain things. For example, we have capacities to learn other languages. The fact that we do not speak them does not by any means suggest that we don't have the potential. We also have powers to change society from the barbarity of capitalism to a more human socialist alternative. This implies that powers may exist but remain unexercised until the appropriate subjective and objective conditions prevail. For example, a qualified manager has causal powers of control. But unless he enters into an employment relationship these powers may lie dormant. However, even when he is employed, it does not follow automatically that he will always exercise control. Sometimes the same employment mechanism will mean that the causal powers of control are countervailed by workers resistance hence the manager is forced to pursue the causal power of co-operation as he works with others.

As has been shown critical realism ontology rejects the positivist atomistic ontology of causation based on cause and event which searches for regularity with the intent to make predictions. Critical realists argue that this thinking is flawed as it reduces social reality to experiences without providing explanation to account for why we have these experiences in the first place. Similarly, it dismisses the postmodernist discursive ontology of multiple realities that hides behind relativism.

A key concept of critical realism is the notion of casual mechanisms. This concept explores the underlying cause of observed events below to explain their emergence. Using mechanisms it is possible to follow through connections and trace development to broader factors that might be indirectly influential but nevertheless not immediately observed. In other words unlike conventional research, which confines itself mainly to empirical events, realism goes further to seek understanding in the domain of the deep where underlying forces behind phenomenon can be explained:

> *The objects that social scientists study, be they wars, discourses, institutions, economic activities, identities, kingship or whatever, are concrete in the sense that they are the product of multiple components and forces. Social systems are always open and usually complex and messy. Unlike some of the natural sciences we cannot isolate out these components and examine them under controlled conditions. We therefore have to rely on abstraction and careful conceptualisation* (Sayer, 2000:19).

Causal mechanisms therefore are a powerful way of helping to capture obscure things that are taken for granted or ignored by mainstream research. Yet they are there and have significant impact on the experiences we observe though not obvious. This way a realist paradigm is able to integrate the micro and the macro giving a wider view of studying social phenomena, thus doing away with seeing things in discrete forms but as a totality. Though a realist philosophy acknowledges that the world is theory laden or concept dependent, however, it rejects the idea that reality is mind constructed and therefore determined by our thoughts. According to Sayer (2000) the intransitivity of the social world still stands although the researchers go to the field with some ideas about phenomenon. There is a distinction between object and subject. Social structures and objects we investigate will not per se change immediately thereafter in line with the ideas of the researcher.

In my research on public sector reforms for example the approach was not one where there is a ready hypothesis with two variables, for instance, the dependent and the independent variable. This would have been a shallow outlook because such approach views phenomena in terms of cause and effect. This has consequences because it limits understanding of a complex process like public sector change. More seriously, it would have been difficult to explain the root cause of these changes and the dynamics in terms of the role played by different agents and structures at different levels — local, international and global.

Neither was it intended to identify patterns nor regularities to form an opinion that could be used as a basis for replication in other cases. As pointed out earlier the complex nature of social phenomena means that, researchers must be careful not to conflate things simply for conventional requirement. Generalising is important but it is not necessarily the best way of explaining things. We can learn a lot not only from regularity but also from the irregularity (Sayer, 2000). For example, the Botswana Police formed an unusual case of so-called exceptional performance in terms of implementation of Performance Management System (PMS) reform. From its differentiation, I traced this success story through generative mechanisms and found that their performance is not entirely due to internal structural attributes. It is also a result of national and international networks, which in one way or the other offered the police assistance in reforming. Undoubtedly, these mechanisms contributed to the police uniqueness in implementing public service reforms. Moreover, these support mechanisms also drew from the global institutions, where the agenda of public sector is being shaped through the

neoliberal ideology of the global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation

Thus, for instance, a critical study of the labour process in Botswana must not end with knowing the underlying causes, it must go further. That means seeking to know why? Necessarily this calls for the examination of phenomenon in totality. It will be incomplete if we were to rely solely on agency and structure like how the introduction of team working has affected staff motivation and organisational performance. Rather, it is crucial to look at the history of team working in association with other global management discourses such as the New Public Management (NPM). Moreover, equally important is the need to comprehend how ordinary workers are affected by this transformation. This relates to the reactions and consequences accompanying the restructuring of Botswana public service. A wider analysis of these neoliberal reforms is therefore entailed in identifying networks, connections and relationships involving agents and structures and how this are linked in furthering the objectives of global capitalism.

Table 1: Structured Ontology

Domain	Entity
Empirical	Experiences, perceptions
Actual	Events and actions
Deep	Structures, mechanisms, powers, relations

Source: Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000:13)

A realist paradigm views the world as comprising of three distinct layers; the real domain where mechanisms, structures, and powers reside, the actual domain is where events and states of affairs occur and the empirical domain where impressions and perceptions are experienced.

The real according to Sayer (2000) is what exists, the nature of objects in both social and physical form and more importantly their structures and powers. The Actual refers to a series of events that follow the activation of powers. And the empirical is what is experienced. By focusing on the empirical, real and the actual domains, critical realism takes account of what Bhaskar, (1989) calls the intransitive objects, which exist independently of agent's identification, and the transitive objects, which are observable. By taking account of the transitory state of the objects, Sayer (2000) notes that realists are able to avoid the tendency of mistaking and misrepresenting things for what they are not because observation is fallible. It is by recognising

the existence of causal mechanisms that we can avoid this problem. Critical realism makes a difference among the three levels of investigating phenomena to avoid the mistake of positivists who conflate complex phenomena by collapsing these separate domains of reality into a single rubric of experiences.

With this consideration realism departs from the traditional studies of management, which examined management from a flat ontology that relied mainly on observing managerial activities and leadership roles (Mintzberg, 1973). Critical realist approach to management and organisation is better because it advocates for new and deeper organisational analysis that looks at 'management causal powers' and their relation to the superstructure (Tsoukas, 2000). According to Tsoukas these causal powers derive from the incorporation of the management process into industrial structure (figure 1). Through the principle of 'generative mechanisms' it is possible for example to examine how the capitalist political structure is central to management control at shop floor. By doing this critical realism is able to move managerial role from merely being a functional position and situates it as social practice that furthers capitalist accumulation.

Figure 1: Industrial Structure and Casual Powers of management
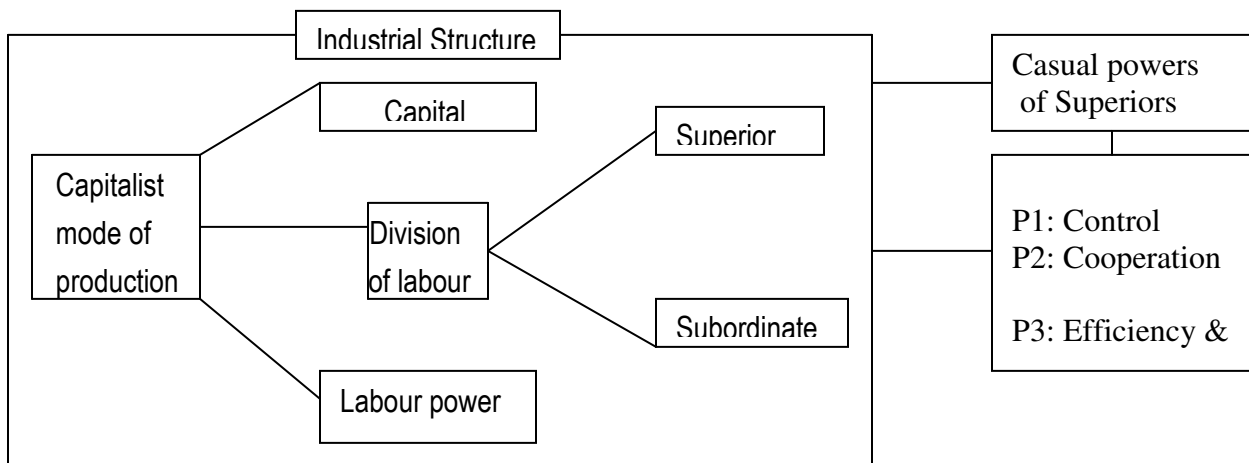
Source Tsoukas (2000:38)

Furthermore, such analysis assists to conceptualise the relations between management and workers beyond the shop floor level where it is atomised as a discrete function. For example, by seeing the role of a manager as agency-bound we can understand why managers resort to both

control and consent to manage workers. In this way, we can also begin to look at the causal mechanisms that both managers and workers deploy to enhance cooperation or resist control. By studying the management function broadly one can thus explain implicit events that are not normally taken for granted although having enormous influence on the experiences and events at the surface. For example, the extent to which international forces influence and shape the introduction of the new management practices, as is the case in Botswana is revealed through causal mechanisms.

Therefore applied to this study a realist perspective was useful in that it allowed investigation of the public sector restructuring at different layers. With its structured ontology critical realism helps to relate phenomena under study with the social context. That means using experiences and abstraction to draw from the historical background and also to relate this with events happening at the micro level. Hence one is able to trace the introduction of management initiatives from the interrelations between agents and structures at different levels of organisational analysis.

 Talking to agents such as managers, police commanders and ordinary workers at shop-floor about reforms, it emerged that the idea of Performance Management System (PMS) and privatisation came from local institutions like the Directorate of Public Service Management (DPSM), Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) and Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC). In turn, these national institutions had connections with international institutions, for instance, The Performance Centre in United States, The UK Police Constabulary and the Adam Smith Institute, from Britain, all of which have links with global financial institutions such as the World Bank.

Events were traced through different processes. The most useful was police weekly performance report meetings. Here interactions between junior and senior police officers revealed the problem of trying to bring transformation in a typically hierarchical and authoritative system. But it also showed how junior police officers are able to establish informal structures and mechanisms that enabled them to cope in such a controlled environment. Official events such as seminars that were mostly accessed through the Internet provided vital clues which otherwise could have been difficult to attend directly.

At the level of the deep the research identified real structures in form of national institutions and sought to understand their role in the implementation of public service reforms. More deeply, these national mechanisms provided further leads that revealed that behind them was a range of

international and global structures, which gave the ideological framework and support necessary for the implementation of the neoliberal reforms such as privatisation and new public management.

> *It does not follow that we can come to understand the 'real individuals, their activity and material conditions of their life' merely by observing and recording them. The reason is that appearances are sometimes deceptive. Things are not always as they seem. For example, to judge by our own observations, the earth stands still, and the sun goes around it. In fact, precisely the opposite is the case* (Callinicos, 1995:85).

Engels (1885:58) was clearer on the way transformation occurs, as he put it, 'historical events thus appear likewise to be governed by chance. But where on the surface accidents holds sway, there actually it is always governed by inner hidden laws and it is only a matter of discovering these laws'.

Methodology

Unlike positivistic research, a realist perspective accommodates a range of empirical research methods depending on the nature of inquiry. Mason (1996) suggests that a coherent research approach must be guided by research questions. Such questions she points out should be wide enough to cover broader issues of the research like socio-political discourse. What this means is that if we are to get a better insight of phenomena it is essential to relate macro and the micro issues.

In my research on theorising public sector reforms in Botswana, the infusion of macro and micro was achieved by integrating Layder (1990) research elements with Mason's research questions to develop relevant questions to help explain the nature of phenomena in terms of these two features (Table 2). This conceptual framework is in step with a realist-stratified ontology because it avoids an atomistic approach to social research. Here emphasis is on holistic understanding of all facets of phenomena. This involved dividing an organisation into five different elements that symbolise the different levels of a social organisation. For each element a variety of questions are posed. That way the researcher was in a position to see the dynamics of public service transformation by seeking to understand causal mechanisms driving phenomena and to reflect on

the nature of relationships between different structures and agents and how this gives rise to contradictions.

According to Layder (1990) the model allows for flexibility because it is not necessary to include all elements. It depends on the circumstances faced by researcher such as, nature of the problem, access to data and availability of resources and research strategies adopted.

Table 2: Research Question Framework

Research Element	Research Question	Data Sources	Purpose
Historical	What are the new management work practices, being implemented in the public service? From where do they originate? What ideas and beliefs inform them? Why are they common now?	Documents Reports Semi structured Interviews -Managers -HRM -Workers	To trace the history and development of the new public management and the premises which underpin it.
Context	What are the underlying forces, polices and attitudes shaping this phenomenon? How are they linked to contemporary global work practices?	Semi structured interviews -Managers -HRM -Workers Documentary analysis Internet	To investigate mechanisms that influence phenomenon and how this might relate to the global context
Setting	What management practices were introduced in case organisations? Why were they adopted? Who authorised them? How were they introduced?	Semi structured interviews -Managers -HRM -Workers Reports and minutes	To know the type working practices in different organisations and how they are working. To understand the rational for

		Documentary analysis	adopting these practices. To shed some light on issues like power relations and participation
Situated Activity	What behaviours, social relations and interactions and contradictions are produced? How do they relate to old work practices?	Participant observation Group meetings and Social gatherings	To find out causal networks, relations and actions that are used to cope with new change
Self	Who is directly affected by these changes? In what way?	Semi structured interviews -Managers -HRM -Workers Documentary analysis Focused groups	To identify those who are really at the centre. To assess the effects of transformation on workers and evaluate their reaction.

An integrated model of change developed on Mason (1996) and Layder (1990)

A key advantage of this model is that it need not be followed religiously. It was used only as guide to help the researcher have a perspective on what level and areas the interview should focus on. This latitude is important for emerging research like this one where the situation and issues are allowed to unfold from the fieldwork.

My concern was towards people than simply seeking to establish the relation between measurable variables. The study sought to understand issues broadly by linking patterns from different angles and levels of organisational analysis in order to explain what actually is (was) changing and why change is occurring in the first place. Obviously, these could not have been possible if the research strategy merely described events from the surface without delving into the deep to explain the underlying cause. Manson, (1996) says that qualitative research is rich because it allows for the production of social explanations. And I think such explanations are

possible given what Maykut and Morehouse, (1994) see as the purpose of qualitative research: Qualitative research, on the other hand, generally examines people's words and actions in a narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by participants.

It is in light of the foregoing that quantitative research was of little use in this study. However, by saying this, I am not completely suggesting that there is no benefit from quantitative research. Indeed, one cannot completely rule it out as it has been found to be useful for illustrative purposes not for prediction. As Bryman (1989) points out it is still possible to blend the two research designs depending on the nature of the research question posed by the researcher. Likewise it was not appropriate as emphasis was more on explaining human agency than on technical aspects of the organisation that are normally quantified through statistical measures to make general statements.

Case Study Method

In my view critical realism is closer to case study than other methods. First, they both acknowledge the importance of contextual analysis and historical embededness Tsoukas, (1989). Secondly, although case study research has been predominated by studies that involve multiple cases, it does however allow for the investigation of a single case on its own as others have shown. This is in line with the realists view that research does not necessarily have to be extensive to be valuable, hence the emphasis on intensive research for its explanatory knowledge not replication Sayer (2000). For me this is a continuation of my earlier work when I did post graduate work. I used the case study research as an exploratory method to study the way technology was being introduced by one organisation and the effects it had on staff. According to Yin (1994:23) case study research is an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence is used

The research was guided by case study design to investigate the new management reforms introduced in the Botswana public sector. Special focus was directed at the police as it was singled out as one organisation where the reforms were working. Also the police was chosen because it is a unique government organ. For example, compared with other government departments the police stands in contrast in terms of the way is structured and run. Based on the

above reasons the choice of the police as a unit of organisational analysis meant that there was no need to comply with convention of large-scale sampling. Case study accommodates purposeful sampling where it is the theory of what is researched that dictates the nature of sample. Precisely, because this not a law-seeking research that intends to replicate the result.

This type of research design is also flexible as it allows for studies that involve natural settings Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, (1988). Initially I thought that I would do four case studies, as I was not sure what the things were like in the field. But as I got more familiar with the environment, I realized that I could focus on just one organisation as a case study of how the process of change unfolded without comparing it to others. Consequently, there was no need to set protocols for embedded cross case comparative analysis as recommended by Yin, (1994) because in an intensive research like this the idea is not to look for similarities as such. Rather the purpose is to identify patterns between the particular case of interest (organisation) with the phenomena of the public sector reforms in general (context) and explaining their connections and relationships through causal mechanisms.

Further, the notion of embedded multiple case appears to be a requirement because it supposedly meets tests of reliability and validity Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, (1988). With respect to the former, different data instruments were used as shown under data gathering. As for validity, even with one case, validity can be confirmed not for the purpose of showing correlation but rather for offering causal analysis. For example, Allison (1971) demonstrated the explanatory power of case study research through a single case in his study of "Cuban Missile Crisis." Similarly, Burawoy (1979) studied the labour process based on single case, and rightly argued that a single case is part of the totality because it has essential features of the whole.

Despite its outstanding history and versatility case study research has its own problems. According to Yin, (1994) this method has been associated with sloppy research by mainstream researchers who wanted to marginalize it thus denying it recognition and status of a research strategy on its on right. Most critiques point out that case study suffers from lack of objectivity because of possible bias by researcher. Others for instance, cite the problem of representativeness emanating from small sample size, which makes it difficult to generalize findings and thus lack of validity (Becker 1963).

In my opinion I don't think these problems should continue to jeopardise the legitimacy of case study research, as there has been credible rebuttal. On the issue of generalisation, Sayer (1984)

notes that intensive research unlike extensive research does not seek empirical correlation but causal analysis. He goes on to state that the problem with large-scale research is that it focuses on 'taxonomic groups' that have common attributes whereas intensive research can be based on differences rather than similarities.

On the question of objectivity, critical realism takes the view that social reality exists independently from agent knowledge and as such we do not determine it. The social world will still exist whether we theorise about it or not. However, realists agree that our ideas do have a bearing on the social world and thus it is concept dependent. Objectivity, Sayer (2000) points out that it means different things to different people. Hence, for the positivists it implies 'value free' research, where a researcher is expected to avoid his influence. This is problematic because we all go into the field with some ideas about the phenomenon we intend to study hence knowledge is therefore 'value laden' as per researchers orientation. Stoecker (1991) notes that the notion that researchers must keep a 'scientific distance' from objects has a negative potential to learning as it separates knowledge from senses and thus serving to deny a necessary connectedness in the learning process. Further, he argues that for 'idiosyncratic studies' such as this one, pre-occupation with objectivity could result in loss of important information because the process is dialectic in nature not linear as is the case with conventional research.

In addition, single case studies have been said to lack reprensentativeness and therefore could not be replicated or generalised in other scenarios. For instance, Yin (1994) states that evidence from multiple case designs is more compelling than single cases. I must however emphasize that for me the concern is not so much about replication. Instead, focus is on explaining patterns in different phenomena. Replication will be more appropriate for example where these cases were similar so that the objective is eventually to draw generalisations and make predictions for the future cases of this nature, as is the norm with empiricism. Nevertheless, the idea of theoretical replication appears to be relevant to critical realism because instead of seeking to determine frequency and extrapolating results to the entire universe, interest is on finding replication as it applies to general phenomenon (Szanton 1981, cited in Yin 1994).
But Sayer (1984) rebuts this reasoning when he points out intensive research such as this does not need to be representative of any population because the intention is not to make generalised findings but to explain similarities and differences in terms of causal mechanisms. Even extensive research that emphasises the importance of systemic sampling and from that claiming to be representative of a given population is problematic because they are descriptions of a particular open systems hence they are unlikely to represent other systems (Sayer 1984:249)

Dialectical Method

One of the weaknesses of critical realism is that it does not fully take into account the historicity of phenomena. The problem of the lack of thoroughgoing analysis which weaves a convincing and coherent account of historical development of phenomena opens problems in understanding the roots and nature of transformation.

We have already seen that a Marxist theory offers a superb alternative for theorising the dynamic change of the capitalist mode of production. This advantage could be mainly attributed to the dialectical method. Basically dialectic suggests that all phenomena, natural and social are in contradiction. This tension leads to a continual state of change comprising of different elements that form a totality (Rees, 1998). In other words, everything is in motion. As Creaven (2000) points out, 'a dialectical method is therefore appropriate to in scientific research because reality is dialectical '. Marx's dialectical method offers a crucial complement to critical realism in closing its methodological deficiency. For example, in terms of researching the issues of transformation in the public service it can give a depth perspective on:

i. Historical explanation of the capitalist mode of production and how this relates to contemporary imperialism under capitalist globalisation.
ii. The contradictions of capitalist accumulation arising from exploitative relations of production hence the necessity of the use of new working practices to valorise surplus value.

This perspective is relevant in the study of the labour process because it is dialectical in nature. The labour process comprises of two contending class forces (capital and labour), which are brought together by the capitalist production. Despite their different objectives they have nevertheless to work together because of interdependence. Dialectical approach is useful here because it captures the general context of the capitalist mode of production and explains why capitalism needs to employ labour and constantly alter the nature of work in order to valorise profits.

Research Techniques

Two instruments are common in collecting data on social science research: primary and secondary techniques. They both lend themselves easy to apply to critical realist perspective. The former is deemed more reliable as it is based on interviews, which allows immediate and

sufficient information. But such evidence can also be manipulated, as it is normally verbal than written. This makes the latter necessary because unlike, an interview it relies on documentary sources such as minutes, which are already written prior to the investigation. Combining these two techniques is useful because additional data that is not given from the interviews is gained through organisational documents like annual reports. Perhaps also important is that, used together, both techniques serve as a test of validity on the data gathered during investigation. Thus for instance, the researcher is in a position to check the reliability of what was said during interviews by reading documentary material (Bryman, 1989).

This is an important lesson for doing research because normally we assume that once entry into an organisation has been secured it follows that the researcher will be given access to official records. Getting to the most crucial data is a hellish struggle that has to be fought in different fronts. Secondary data has limitations as it's normally ready-made but it can also offer important sources. For example, a careful read of the annual reports and quarterly magazines can be valuable in closing the official vacuum. Old magazines may be useful for providing further leads to other sources.

Data Analysis

Bryman (1989) points out that the process of data analysis is not an isolated component of the research, which comes last. Rather, he suggests that it is an integrative process because some of the themes can be drawn at an early stage from the research questions as well as from the fieldwork. This suggests that one does not need to complete fieldwork and then start the analysis as the next stage. Instead, they are seen as both interwoven in nature hence the need for a deliberate and creative approach that recognises that data gathering forms part of a continuing process of interpretation. Critical realist approach gives space for this with its bias for qualitative analysis. This is possible through adoption of a theme-based approach. As the research process unfolds, one has to recognise some recurring topics and emerging issues. These are then listed with the purpose to identifying key issues that came from different interviews, in other words, building themes. The result of this is to develop certain propositions about phenomena. Such propositions are useful as they eventually help in shaping the topics or headings of the study.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show that there are fundamental problems in the philosophy of science. One problem is the domination of discourse by positivism. The arrival of critical realism as new philosophy in the social sciences was a response to this lacuna. As Brown (2002)

explains, 'one explanation for the broad appeal must lie in a general dissatisfaction with the respective traditional materials taught in philosophy of sciences, humanities and beyond.' Indeed, with its stratified and emergent reality, critical realism has presented a serious challenge to positivist insistence on experimentation as *sine quo non* of scientific research. A realist, ontology is suitable to investigating phenomena because it emphasises the need to adopt a structured ontology to explain the interaction between structure and agency. This depth analysis is crucial to understanding contemporary global changes as it integrates the macro and micro domains which are entwined but often separated in empiricist research. In addition, its causal explanatory method is an essential way of identifying the underlying generative mechanisms that are behind the events and experiences at the surface. For example, the transformations in work organisation at the micro or business level through concepts like performance management can be ascribed to deeper macro-social structures and agents at global level shaping the nature work on a global scale not just to enhance productivity but crucially to further accumulation by promoting cost saving strategies such as outsourcing and flexible working.

Whilst my main concern was to show the merits of realist philosophy however I have also argued that critical realism also contain some deficiencies. For instance, it does not go deeper enough to be compatible with Marx and Engels basic features of historical materialism. The way it historicises phenomena is confused because it lacks a dialectical analysis which helps in explaining phenomena as a totality. This weakness means that it is not possible to find the root cause of events and mechanisms if there is no theory of contradiction. Engels dialectical materialism can enrich its application to contemporary philosophy. For me, the dialectical method was useful in helping in understanding the complexity of transformation and connecting the management role to the socio-economic issues and the wider historical perspective of capitalist work organisation. Moreover, the dialectical method provided a systematic methodological analysis of the labour process, especially as it starts from the fundamental issues that drive the neo-liberal project, which are capital and labour conflict and the resultant accumulation and exploitation. I argued therefore that, infused with materialist philosophy, critical realism can serve as a useful diagnostic framework in organisational analysis. This is important in explaining the underlying structures, mechanisms and relations that we often ignore in doing management research. Despite its limits, critical realism is relevant in management studies particularly in light of the fact that today's organisations are going through profound changes that needs to be contextualised. Its thoroughgoing critique of mainstream research has

opened new insights to researchers to rethink it as a viable alternative to positivism and postmodernism.

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