

A research agenda for strategic management research in developing countries

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This paper explores the extent to which it is possible to address issues pertaining to developing countries with significant socio-cultural and political interventions. Examples from the Sri Lankan tea plantations are used to illustrate the necessity to understand the context from actors' perspectives using rigorous case study research, before making prescriptive recommendations. Current problems faced by the Sri Lankan tea industry are identified as not merely micro-institutional or managerial. We argue that their roots lie in reproduction of social struggles at the level of production. We propose a research agenda, in the doctrine of critical theory, for exploring the formation and implementation of business strategies in developing countries, using the tea plantation sector as a case. Our primary attempt here is to conceptualize strategic management in the context of political economy and to identify central issues to be addressed. Accordingly, we argue that researching historical dynamics of strategic management facilitates understanding and interpreting the articulation of modes of production in a given social formation. We further argue that a highly context specific research agenda is required to fully comprehend idiosyncratic characteristics of Sri Lankan strategy structures and organizational forms. Then, it is proposed that explaining the role of social formation in shaping and reshaping strategy relations should be at the centre of the research due to the social significance attached to 'strategy'. Finally, methodological and epistemological necessities arising from the nature of strategy relationships are discussed.

Key words: Tea plantations; Economic reality; Strategic management; Human capital; Research methods