

Nonpositivism in Behavioral Accounting Research: Initiated a Collaboration of Paradigm

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Abstract- *The purpose of this article is to explain how a paradigm can affect research results and how a paradigm apparently is no longer relevant in answering a practice, especially in behavioral accounting research. In addition, this article also want to describe what is the appropriate paradigm for development associated with behavioral accounting research. This article suggests that the failure of behavioral accounting research to narrow down between the research and practice of accounting due to the paradigm used in behavioral accounting research. Based on the characteristics of the behavioral accounting research interpretivism paradigm is more suitable. However, between positivism and interpretivism paradigm has advantages and disadvantages of each, and therefore the collaboration between the two is necessary.*

Key words- *Behavioral accounting research; Interpretivism paradigm; Positivism paradigm*

1. INTRODUCTION

Accounting is one of various systems to produce financial information that is used in the process of making business' decision. Accounting is not something static, but will continue to evolve over time with the development of the accounting environment to provide information needed by the user (Komsiyah & Indriantoro, 2000). Thus, the accounting cannot be separated from human behavioral aspects as well as the organization's needs that can be generated by the accounting. The urgency of the accounting's need and the importance of human's role in accounting then by adopting other science such as psychology and social science, behavioral accounting research was born (Putri, 2009). Behavioral accounting research is a branch of accounting that studies the relationship between human's behavior with the accounting system (Siegel, Marconi, & Helena, 1989). Behavioral accounting research is a very broad field. In the development of its empirical research, it begins with accounting field and then into other fields (Putri, 2009). Birnberg & Shields (1989) and Meyer & Rigsby (2001) classified research issues in the field of behavioral accounting research, as follows: (1) Managerial control, (2) Accounting information processing, (3) Accounting information system designing, (4) Auditing, and (5) Organizational sociology. In addition to the five above, there are still many topics about behavioral accounting research that often appear in Behavioral Research in Accounting Journal (BRIA), for example ethics, culture, methodology and accounting career. Seeing the importance of the behavioral aspects of accounting and breadth of issues in behavioral accounting research, it is not surprising that the development of behavioral accounting

research is in the rapid progression (Kusuma, 2003). However, the rapid amount of this research is inversely proportional to the benefits for the world of practice. Some criticism on the accounting research is that accounting research only has little value for the accounting practice or accounting development as an academic discipline (Inanga & Schneider, 2005), as well as the behavioral accounting research. Accounting research should aim to improve accounting practice, but the reality of matter is that there is a wide gap between the study of accounting, accounting education, and accounting practice (Baxter, 1988.; Hopwood, 1988.; Lee, 1989). Research is a bridge between theory and practice, as well as the behavioral accounting research. Behavioral theories, then connected them with the practices that occur in accounting through research, will make that bridge happens. The confirmed theory can be a guide to explain the real world phenomenon. The result also can be used to fix the accounting practices (Kurnia, 2012). The Social research, including behavioral accounting research is a process in searching the science that is expected to be useful in developing new theory and solving problem related with the economic, management, and accounting issue (Damayanti, 2013). The inability of behavioral accounting research in explaining accounting practice perhaps because of the unmatched paradigm used, because the paradigm of research leads the researcher to understand and answer problems and testing criteria as the foundation to answer research problems (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Therefore, this article wants to see on how the paradigm can affect the result of research and see how the paradigm is no longer relevant in answering a practice, especially in behavioral accounting research. According to Kuhn (1962), when a certain paradigm is no longer become a guide or no longer be able to answer life's

problems that always evolve to be more complex, so the old paradigm will experience anomaly and crisis will happen next. The old paradigm is no longer considered relevant, thus experiencing a paradigm shift to the others. Besides, this article also wants to see the match paradigm to be developed that is related to behavioral accounting research.

2. PARADIGM AND ITS BENEFITS

Paradigm is someone's way of thinking in seeing or understanding something. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982) as cited by Moleong (2005), paradigm is a loose set from some assumptions that were held together, concept or proposition that directs the way of thinking and research. On the other hand, Kuhn (1962) explained paradigm as someone's way of thinking to the social reality which affected by his or her way of thinking. The concept of science which is developed in a research is very depended on the paradigm used by the writer with the certain analysis methods and techniques. Research paradigm according to Indriantoro & Supomo (1999) is a frameworks which explains about how researcher's way of thinking to the social life's facts and researcher's treatment to the science and theory. Research paradigm also explains about how researcher understands the problems and the testing criteria as the foundation to answer the research problems. Currently, there is a development of science paradigm that comes from how the scientists looked at a reality. Kuhn (1962) assumed that differences paradigm in developing science will give birth to different knowledge. Because if the way scientists think (mode of thought) different each other in catching a reality, then naturally their understanding of the reality will become diverse. In understanding social reality, different paradigm will cause different beliefs, values, and norms. When certain paradigm is no longer able to become guidance or no longer able to answer life's problem that always evolve to be more complex, so the old paradigm will experience anomaly, and then a crisis. The old paradigm is no longer relevant. According to Kuhn (1962), science crisis was firstly marked by the existence of unsolved problems that create anomalies situation. The existence of these problems led to a shift from the old paradigm into the new one to answer problems that arise. Kuhn (1962) believed that science has the data collection period in a paradigm. Revolution then occurs after a paradigm becomes fully grown. Paradigm is able to cope with anomalies. Some anomalies are tackled within a paradigm. However, when a lot of anomalies disrupt and threaten the discipline matrix then a paradigm becomes untenable. When a paradigm cannot be maintained then the scientists can move to a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1970).

3. POSITIVISM AND NONPOSITIVISM : THE FUTURE AND THE PRESENT OF

BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH ACCOUNTING

In the past, the accountants just focused on the measurement of income and expense that studied the performance of the company to predict the future. They ignored the fact that past performance was the result of human behavior and the past performance itself was a factor that will affect behavior in the future (Tiyan, 2013). At that time various behavioral factors were considered as "black box" that had less attention (Ashton, Hopper, & Scapens., 1984). Behavior played an important role in accounting practices, and therefore later appears behavioral accounting research. Hudayati (2002) explained more detail the scope of behavioral accounting which includes (1) studied the influence of human behavior to the design, construction, and the use of accounting system implemented in the company, which means how the attitude and leadership style of management affect the nature of accounting control and organization design ;(2) Studied the effect of accounting system on human's behavior, which means how the accounting system affects motivation, productivity, decision making, job satisfaction and cooperation, also (3) Method to predict human's behavior and strategy to change it, which means how the accounting system can be used to influence behavior. Therefore, the focus of behavioral accounting research is how human's behavior affects a system of accounting, and how accounting system affect and human's behavior and prediction of human's behavior. Behavioral accounting research is important because this study takes the viewpoint of human's behavior as the focus of discussion. Human's role in accounting becomes very important because accounting is produced by the human with the purpose of decision-making (which is also performed by human). This has led to the rapid growth of behavioral accounting research studies (Kusuma, 2003). Unfortunately, this study was not able to narrow the gap between the research and practice of accounting (Baxter, 1988.; Hopwood, 1988.; Lee, 1989). The study from Kuang & Tin (2010) showed the use of research methods that had been used mostly in the BRIA period of 1998-2003, that are experiment (48, 83%) and survey (35%). Besides the methods mentioned above, once appeared theoretical/non-empirical article in the publication of BRIA (16, 67%), while the case study method was the least method that used during the BRIA period 1998-2003. The same result proposed by Meyer & Rigsby (2001) that experiment method dominated the research of BRIA in the period of 1989-1998. Looking at the trend of behavioral accounting research in years 1989-2003, showed that methods used are experiment, survey, and non-empirical. While the experiment and survey is research methods in positivism paradigm. The inability of the research's result, especially behavioral accounting research to narrow the gap between research and accounting practice and the

existence of reality that study of behavioral accounting research use positivism paradigm showed that the use of positivism paradigm in behavioral accounting research is considered as no longer relevant. Kuhn (1962) stated that when a certain paradigm cannot become guidance again or cannot answer life's problem that always evolve to be more complex, the old paradigm will no longer relevant. The existence of these problems led to a shift from the old paradigm to a new one to answer the problems that arise. The use of a particular paradigm will result in certain conclusions, which it would be very different if using different paradigm (Ludigdo, 2007). Burrell dan Morgan (1979) divided paradigm into 4 things; The Functionalist Paradigm, The Interpretive Paradigm, The Radical Humanist Paradigm dan The Radical Structuralist Paradigm. While Indriantoro & Supomo (1999) categorized paradigm based on quantitative and qualitative approaches. Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta (2007) revealed that various paradigms vary depending on the view of the researchers, but generally accepted paradigm is divided into three parts; positivism, critical theory dan interpretivism. Positivism paradigm views the world as something that has been arranged systematically, patterned, and objective and to obtain generalization by looking for relationship between variables. In the positivism paradigm, the truth that is being looked for is something that already exist, therefore the researcher's task is to find the truth that never been found before through the deductive process. Besides, the researcher's task is to explain about what happened objectively to the events being examined, also not searching into the meaning behind something that visible. Positivism paradigm was developed to support and make true various methods or accounting practice in the real world (Riduwan, 2007). This paradigm has many weaknesses, such as not able to provide things to fix accounting practice, as well as happened in behavioral accounting research. Even Deegan (2004) gave a view that positivism paradigm separate themselves from accountant practice. Other weakness from positivism paradigm is this research is not value free. This thing was confirmed by the researchers that they did not want to force their view into other's mind, but more like to give information about implication expected from certain actions and let people to decide about what they have to do. On the other hand, non-positivism paradigm view the world as something that disorganized and patterned objectively, so a particular approach is needed to understand every indication that arise. The objective of this paradigm is to understand the meaning on someone's or group's experience in an event. Experience is not considered as the empiric reality that has objective characteristic, but a lesson that can be taken from the event experienced by someone. The truth is obtained through understand it holistically, and not only depended on the data or information that being viewed, but also based on the visible information and deeply being dig,

unique truth, and cannot occur in general. Based on the explanation above, the differences between positivism paradigm and un-positivism paradigm explained in the table 1. Looking at the characteristics from behavioral accounting research that view on how the behavior affect an accounting system, how the accounting system affect human's behavior and prediction on human's behavior and the behavior as the random pattern and fluctuate. So that it is almost impossible if we expect to make a pattern on the behavior. Besides, behavior experience from one and another is various, so the behavior is a something that is very subjective because it is a lesson that can be taken from the event experienced by someone. Because that behavior is subjective, then the research of behavioral accounting research is not enough to go deeper on the thing that is visible, but should be based on the invisible information and going deeper in details. Looking at the characteristics from behavioral accounting research, the positivism paradigm is viewed as the un-matched part to go deeper on behavioral accounting research. It is clearly seen that characteristic from behavioral accounting research is nearer with the non-positivism paradigm.

Table 1: Differences of positivism and non-positivism Paradigm

Positivism Paradigm	Non-Positivism Paradigm
View the world as something that systematically set-up, patterned, and objective	View the world as something that not set-up and un-patterned objectively
Aim to get generalization by looking for the relationship between variables	Aim to understand the meaning on someone's or group's experience in one event
The truth being searched is something that already exist	The truth is not considered as the empiric reality that has objective characteristic, but as a lesson that can be taken from the events experienced by someone
Explain the thing that happened as the reality and objectively	Experience is not considered as the empiric reality that has objective characteristic, but a lesson that can be taken from the events experienced by someone
Not looking the meaning behind something visible	Based on the invisible information and going deeper in details

Different from the positivism paradigm, the non-positivism paradigm give the detailed view from the accounting practice that cannot be found in the literature (Richardson, 2012). Parker (2012) stated that non-positivism paradigm

is more deeply in understanding and critic on the process and give the understanding about something unique and different. The main objective from the non-positivism paradigm is to approach the exits reality (Hopper & Powell, 1985). The non-positivism paradigm is a research that is conducted in a certain setting in the real life with the purpose to investigate and understand the phenomenon: what happened, why is it happened, and how is it happened. So, the non-positivism paradigm is based on the concept of “going exploring” that involved in-depth and case-oriented study on some cases or single case (Finlay, 2006). On the other hand, the non-positivism paradigm actually will approach the accounting researchers and the accounting practices as the main purpose of the non-positivism paradigm is to make an approach to the available reality (Hopper & Powell, 1985). In fact, the non-positivism paradigm proposes the detail insight of an accounting practice which is unavailable in the literature (Richardson, 2012). Therefore, the large number of researches based on the non-positivism paradigm will eliminate the accounting researchers’ failure in restoring the existing practices as well as in the behavioral accounting research. There are some reasons proposed by Chariri (2009) why the non-positivism paradigm needs to be done, especially those which are related to the behavioral accounting research. Firstly, the study field is not a “free from value” discipline. It means that the business and management activities are highly related to the values, norms, culture, and certain behavior occur in a business environment. If the environment is different, the style and approach used can be different. This is caused by the fact that management/business is a socially constructed reality which is formed by individual interaction and its individual; it is a human creation practice; it is a symbolic discourse which is formed by its individual and it is the result of human creativity. Secondly, not all values, behavior and interaction between social actors and their environment can be quantified. This is caused by someone’s perception about something is depends heavily on the values, vulture, experience and so forth, which are carried by the concerned individual. Based on the above explanation, it is clearly see that the non-positivism paradigm approaches more on the behavioral accounting research. The use of non-positivism paradigm in behavioral accounting research is hoped to bridge the wide gap between behavioral accounting research and accounting practices.

4. THE WEAKNESSES OF INTERPRETIVISM PARADIGM : A CHALLENGE

Besides the strengths in non-positivism paradigm of behavioral accounting research, Chariri (2009) also identifies that there are some weaknesses in non-positivism paradigm. For example, the researchers can’t be 100% independent and neutral from the research setting.

Moreover, non-positivism paradigm is very unstructured and messy. A lot of researchers are questioning the bias and carefulness of interpretivism paradigm since Ahrens & Dent (1998) make a requirement that scientific researches must be careful and unbiased. Ijiri (1975) identifies that there are at least three things that must be concerned in a scientific research which is hoped to give a contribution for the development of education. The first one is that the research should always be new and up to date, the second is that the research finding must be kept through a logical thought and can be verified by the other researchers, and the last one is that the research finding must be able to be disseminated. To achieve those three things, the research must be done based on the principle of logical thinking and rules of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Ahrens & Dent (1998) state that the research should include 2 elements; art and science. When the research includes art, it means that the research must attract the interest and investigate the real case in organization and also relate it to the accounting theory. However, it will be dangerous if the research only includes art without including science. Therefore, the research must be careful and unbiased in order to fulfill the science criterion. A research will meet the science criterion if it is carefully done and unbiased. A careful and unbiased research must consider the validity aspects (construct validity, internal validity and eksternal validity) as well as the reliability (Lilis, 2006). In a research based on positivism paradigm, validity and reliability should not be questioned as positivism really concerns about validity and reliability. However, in an interpretivism paradigm, the validity and reliability often arouse a big question.

5. THE COLLABORATION OF PARADIGM IN BEHAVIORAL ACCOUNTING RESEARCH

Noticing each of the weakness and strength of positivism paradigm and non-positivism paradigm, there are some ideas to make collaboration from both paradigms in behavioral accounting research. Positivism paradigm has strength in considering the validity and reliability which become the indicator of a careful and unbiased research. Nevertheless, this paradigm in behavioral accounting research is unable to overcome the wide gap between the accounting research and the accounting practices (Baxter, 1988.; Hopwood, 1988.; Lee, 1989). In contrast, non-positivism paradigm is considered to be able to overcome the wide gap between the accounting research and the accounting practices since interpretivism paradigm gives detail insight from an accounting practice which can’t be found in literature (Richardson, 2012); it emphasizes on the comprehension and criticism of a process and it proposes a comprehension about a unique and different thing (Parker, 2012); it approaches on the existing reality as well as in-depth (Hopper & Powell, 1985) and case-oriented study on some cases or a single case (Finlay,

2006). Unfortunately, the validity and reliability of non-positivism paradigm are frequently being questioned (Young & Selto, 1993). For that reason, it will be better if the behavioral accounting research collaborates on both paradigms in order to achieve an optimal result.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a sharp increase on the research development of behavioral accounting research. However, this sharp increase is on contrast with its benefits for the practices world. The accounting research including behavioral accounting research only has a little value for the accounting practices. Moreover, there is a wide gap between the accounting research and the accounting practices. Some researches' results show that during 1989-2003, the methods used in behavioral accounting research are experiment, survey, and non-empirical methods. Meanwhile, the experiment and survey are the research methods used in positivism paradigm. The inability of the research results, especially the behavioral accounting research to narrow the gap between the research and the accounting practices and the reality that the behavioral accounting research uses the positivism paradigm, show that the use of positivism paradigm in behavioral accounting research is no longer relevant. The characteristics of behavioral accounting research are observing how the behavior influences an accounting system, how the accounting system influences human behavior and predicts human behavior and behavior is a random pattern which frequently fluctuates. Therefore, it is almost impossible to expect to make a pattern of a certain behavior. Besides that, the behavioral experience of one person and another is very various. It makes the behavior becomes subjective since it constitutes a lesson based on someone's experience. Having known that behavior is really subjective, behavioral accounting research should not only excavate something seen but also excavate something unseen in detail. Noticing the characteristics of behavioral accounting research, positivism paradigm is regarded to be unsuitable to dig out behavioral accounting research. It is clearly seen that the characteristics of behavioral accounting research is closer to the non-positivism paradigm. Beyond all of the strength of non-positivism paradigm in behavioral accounting research, the validity and reliability of this paradigm are still being questioned. Thus, there should be collaboration between non-positivism paradigm and positivism in order to eliminate the weakness of each paradigm and to demonstrate their strength.

7. REFERENCES

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