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### *Methodology Matters:*

A new forum for advancing understanding of research methods and practice.

Bill Lee (University of Sheffield)

#### **Introduction**

Welcome to the exciting development marked by *Methodology Matters*. This section of the journal has been established to provide a peer-reviewed outlet for articles in the management area that make a methodological contribution. If the development of Business and Management Schools and related bodies of knowledge have been late in many countries when compared to other Social Science departments in academe (Currie, Davies and Ferlie, 2016; Engwell and Danell, 2011; Ivory, Miskell, Shipton, White, Moeslein and Neely, 2006; Mangematin and Baden-Fuller, 2008; Morris, 2011), the establishment of the academic superstructure of research tracks and research journals to support the advancement of thinking around research methods and research practice has been even later (Lee and Cassell, 2013). Unfortunately, the journal quality lists that have been developed and used to second guess what the outcomes might be in the research quality audits that are becoming commonplace in many countries, have a tendency to provide low rankings for new journals concerned with methodology, while longer-standing ones with higher rankings have demonstrated publication patterns that are skewed towards particular types of methods and philosophical leanings. There are reasons to believe that a number of institutions in Europe and on other continents follow the practice of many American Ivy League universities of encouraging their academics to either publish in a limited number of specified journals, or to only publish in journals that are ranked highly in such journal quality lists (Battilana, Anteby, and Sengul, 2010, p 697; Grey, 2010, p 685; Hussain, 2015; Khatri, Ojha, Budhwar, Srinivasan and Varma, 2012, p 110; Üsdiken, 2014 p 770). A consequence may be that the development of some research methods and research practices – along with our understanding of these methods and approaches – have been limited by the dearth of highly ranked outlets which has had a concomitant impact on the conduct of research. This is likely to stifle innovation and contribute to an unhealthy level of standardization (Mingers and Willmott, 2013; see, also, Grey, 2010; Hussain, 2015).

The establishment of a special section in a well-respected, longstanding and highly-ranked journal like the *European Management Review (EMR)* helps to overcome this

problem. *EMR* has a history of stimulating debate on methods and research approaches (for examples, Patel, 2017; Point, Fendt and Jonsen, 2017). The introduction of the section *Methodology Matters* takes this support a step further by providing a regular outlet for debates on research methods and research practice. The position of *EMR* as the journal of a truly international constituency – namely the European Academy of Management (EURAM) – with a readership beyond, means that it is well positioned to build on the plurality of theoretical, epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches that exist to provide a stimulating forum for advancement of our understanding of the full range of issues and practice relating to the conduct of research. In the rest of the introduction to this new section, I intend to elaborate on the aspirations for the section, to provide details of the papers that have been accepted for publication in the section to date and to comment on the review process to help provide guidance for authors who are considering submitting their work to *Methodology Matters* in the future.

### **Aspirations for *Methodology Matters***

*Methodology Matters* will provide an outlet for novel discussions and studies relating to any stage of the conduct of research, from consideration of epistemological and ontological underpinnings, through different approaches to literature reviews, ways of formulating research questions, new methods of collecting evidence, analysing that material, theorising from that evidence, writing about research, evaluating that research and disseminating findings to academic and other audiences. Submissions should normally be based on strong logical argument, comprehensive literature reviews of the stage of the research process being discussed and either appropriate empirical evidence of the research practice under consideration or detailed illustrations from experience. As befits the position of EURAM as a community of engaged scholars, the section will also welcome papers that consider how to define problems through engagement with a practitioner audience, the ways of establishing rapport in the processes of collecting evidence to generate solutions that are relevant for practitioners and tried and tested methods of disseminating findings to practitioners and helping them to derive benefits from those findings. The idea of engagement with practitioners is not, however, a call for papers that articulate only the interests of management. Submissions should be respectful of the broad range of stakeholder interests that are affected by modern organizations.

The intention is that *Methodology Matters* will be plural in its acceptance of the wide range of different intellectual, theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions and methodological predilections that exist across Europe and elsewhere. Moreover, it will respect the integrity of each different approach and adopt what Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon (2006) have described as contingent criteria, to ensure that assessment of papers respects the respective tradition and reviewers will be selected accordingly. The *Methodology Matters* section is, thus, not encouraging the submission of contributions that argue for the application of criteria that are inappropriate to a particular method. *Methodology Matters* will also not be seeking to publish articles about methodological innovations, etc., that are bereft of context. Submissions to the section are encouraged to respect the nature of *EMR* as a general European management journal and consider whether any innovation discussed is specific to a particular discipline or transferable to other disciplines in the management field. Where appropriate, submissions should also demonstrate some sensitivity to the national context(s) in which any innovation was developed and consider whether there are particular facilitators in that context which might not be present in other parts of *EMR*'s constituency. Recognition of the importance of context to understanding of knowledge means that *Methodology Matters* is not seeking submission of empirical articles that are wholly reliant on researching of students who are then presented as a proxy of a completely different group from another organizational setting.

Context will be an important consideration for *Methodology Matters* in other ways. The conduct of research is affected by many factors including the resources that are available to the researcher – such as comprehensive libraries, databases, computerised analysis packages, the possibility of international alliances for collaboration – which may facilitate research while their absence may constitute obstacles (Gantman, Yousfi and Alcadipani, 2015). The context may also skew debates. The existence or otherwise of journals in a field, the previously mentioned predilections of journals' editors and reviewers for particular approaches and the practice of lists in promoting some journals as better outlets than others, the "linguistic imperialism" (Philipson, 1992) that arises from the dominance of English as a publication language, the regulation of research by ethical committees, the resources to attend conferences and to network can all affect the way in which research is conducted and our knowledge shaped by criteria other than the value of

the contribution. *Methodology Matters* encourages the submission of papers that highlight the ways in which institutional practices and facilities have skewed the development of our knowledge and which offer ways of countering that biasing.

If you are interested in submitting to *Methodology Matters*, the initial call for papers may be found at the journal's home page -

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17404762> - and contains suggestions for specific topics.

### **Contributions accepted by *Methodology Matters***

To date, three articles have been accepted for publication in *Methodology Matters*. The first contribution by Stefanie Reissner appears directly below. As the section provides a space in which researchers may reflect on practice, consider disadvantages experienced by some authors and provide guidance on how to overcome such disadvantages, Reissner's article is a welcome addition to the literature. Reissner reports on how reflexivity is often seen as a means for qualitative researchers to understand the ways in which they impact on the research interviews that they conduct. However, researchers have different attributes which can affect a capacity for reflexivity. Reissner develops the aid of a conversational space map to help those researchers whose strengths are for visual, rather than textual, recognition to be more reflexive.

It is fitting in the journal of a community of engaged scholars such as EURAM that the second contribution that will appear in the *Methodology Matters* section, by Thomas Schumacher, discusses a novel approach to practitioner and academic collaboration. Approaches that combine learning with intervention are now well established in the management disciplines and there has been much debate about the difference between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge in addition to considerations of the attainment of the rigour demanded of academic work and the relevance of the knowledge generated to practitioners. Schumacher locates his development of a practitioner-practitioner-researcher inquiry group (PPRIG) model in this literature. His PPRIG model offers a novel way in which practitioners and academics may work together to best effect. The distinctive part of the PPRIG model over other approaches that involved practitioners inside an organization and academics collaborating involves the introduction of a third party of an additional practitioner who is an outsider but who visits the organization in which understandings of

practices are sought. Schumacher's contribution provides details of the methodology for implementing the PPRIG and a discussion of the enhanced understanding it may bring for all parties.

The third contribution that will appear has been co-authored by Catherine Cassell and Vicky Bishop and discusses different methods of qualitative analysis. At a time when ideas about meta-analysis have been known for some time as a means of combining quantitative findings (Gurevitch, Koricheva, Nakagawa and Stewart, 2018) and there are an increasing number of journal outlets including *Big Data & Society*, *Big Data Research* and *Journal of Big Data*, accommodating articles that are concerned with the aggregation of different data sets, it is also useful to think about how different forms of qualitative analysis might be applied to derive different forms of meanings and understanding from the same information. That is the unique contribution that Cassell and Bishop make in their paper. Using a single dataset from study of taxi drivers, a ubiquitous presence in many countries, Cassell and Bishop draw out the distinctive types of research questions, findings and potential for theorising that are facilitated by thematic, metaphoric and story-telling forms of analysis.

The papers documented above are the ones that have completed the process of review, but there are others that are at various stages of review and some are likely to appear in forthcoming issues to help establish longevity for this new section.

### **Future submissions to *Methodology Matters***

Although *Methodology Matters* is a distinctive part of *EMR*, it is a section of that journal. In line with the high standards established by *EMR*, all articles submitted will be first reviewed by the section editor to establish whether they merit sending to expert reviewers for comment. While the section will continue with the *EMR* practice of allowing authors that pass this initial test to propose reviewers – and the section editor will try to obtain one high class review from such nominees – not all of the reviewers for a paper will be nominated by a paper's author(s). Reviewers will also be drawn from academics known by the editor of the section to have expertise on the particular topic and from those who have registered themselves as having expertise in the specified area on the *EMR* database. Thus, if you wish to help shape the future debates around research methods and research practice in *Methodology Matters*, I encourage you to not only submit your work for

consideration of publication in this new section, but to also register as a reviewer for *EMR* and state the areas of research methods, methodology and practice in which you have expertise. One way in which you can do this is by contacting me directly – e-mail [w.j.lee@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:w.j.lee@sheffield.ac.uk).

Competing demands for space in the journal means that the general expectation will be that a condition of authors being offered an opportunity to revise and resubmit their articles is that all of a paper's reviewers encourage the section editor to make such an offer, otherwise the article may be rejected. When it is appropriate to reject an article, I aim to ensure that the reviews and feedback are of the highest quality to help the development of authors' work and enhancement of their subsequent opportunities to publish. Please participate in this exciting new initiative and submit your best work on the development of research methods and practice for consideration of publication in *Methodology Matters*.

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