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Reaffirming Opportunities for Pluralism in Management Scholarship

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INTRODUCTION

The European Academy of Management serves an important intellectual platform for, and offers a unique vantage point on, the creation and dissemination of management scholarship for the benefit of different stakeholders. Given the diverse institutional, cultural, philosophical, linguistic, and pedagogical traditions that mark this academic community, there is an inevitable heterogeneity at the heart of our Academy; one which serves as a strength for scholars and for scholarship. European Management Review as the Academy's journal can benefit from the intrinsic plurality that accompanies this heterogeneity. Actively embracing and leveraging such plurality is critically important in the face of what Tsui (2007, p.1353) has characterised as a "worrisome" trend towards homogenisation in the paradigms employed, the phenomena explored, and the methodological approaches adopted in conducting management research. A diminution in pluralism in the design, conduct and reporting of management research, for many, means that we are less well placed to generate the significant knowledge gains required to address pressing challenges. It also leaves us less girded to answer certain critical charges including questions relating to the relevance of our scholarship, the enduring academic-practice divide, and the dearth of contextualisation in the research effort. It is against this backdrop that we reaffirm some selected opportunities for harnessing aspects of this pluralism via context, language, intellectual traditions, and methodological approaches.

CONTEXTUALISATION

Since its inception, European Management Review has sought to represent a breadth of scholarship and a diversity of perspectives and approaches. Andersen *et al*., (2018) in their bibliometric of the manuscripts published in the journal in the first 15 years of its existence identified four main clusters of scholarship covering innovation, strategic management, corporate governance, and human resource management. The innovation cluster, which was the largest in their analysis, focused on how organizations manage the process of developing and embedding new knowledge. The body of work in the strategic management cluster covered contributions on strategic direction, capabilities and managing resources in relation to internal and external environments. The corporate governance cluster encompassed studies focused on a range of formal and informal institutions impacting practices throughout a variety of different European settings, while the human resource cluster covered a cohort of work on effective human capital deployment. In these and related domain areas, the journal has sought to represent a broad range of paradigms, perspectives, and approaches often seen as characteristic of European research traditions, though the leitmotifs of these traditions and the extent to which they are particular to European scholarship are of course debated.

Motivated by the importance of inclusivity and a recognition that we can all benefit from providing a platform for a range of scholarly traditions, the journal has variously experimented with submissions in different languages (Özbilgin, 2014) and called attention to the potential value of a network of scholars who could keep editorial teams informed of specific developments in a particular country (Lee *et al*., 2019). Although each new proposal as it emerges can and does face challenges, these should not negate either the need for, or the aspiration to embrace pluralism, and to renew acknowledged ways, or indeed conceive of new ones, in which we might profit from it. As part of this effort, the journal has also espoused the value of a contextual perspective. Özbilgin (2014, p.3) in his editorial emphasises the idea of "contextual depth". In explaining its meaning and importance, he underscores the significance of "the thickness of the description of the context" and cites examples relating to time (e.g., history, trajectories, processes) and place (e.g., location, region, sectoral or organizational setting), expositions of which can serve to situate the theoretical contribution of a manuscript. Wrapped up in the longstanding debate on universalism versus particularism, the academic conversation about this contextual depth and its importance in the overall research effort has gained some ground in recent years. Arising from the basic principle that there are differences in the way elements of management are understood and practised in different situations, at an intuitive level, the contextual perspective implies that what operates effectively in one such situation may be less effective in another. While of course acknowledging that ideas travel and the importation and adaptation of particular features of one system into another will occur, a blanket approach to the transposition is likely to be constrained. The result for many scholars means that we must give expression to a more pluralistic reality in our research models to capture the influence of aspects of context (Teagarden *et al*., 2018), in particular key idiosyncratic elements at play which can strongly influence the development of formal structures, systems, and preferred approaches in organizations, oftentimes more profoundly than market pressures (Tregaskis *et al*., 2001). The leveraging of this more contextual approach can reveal what Minbaeva (2016, p.95) describes as "nuances which become apparent when we use context heterogeneity as a source of theorizing and avoid post hoc contextualization". However, it must also be acknowledged that there is an inherent complexity involved in delivering on this approach, often involving the teasing out of an array of distal and proximal factors operating at different levels that may account for commonalities and differences across contexts. Thus, while it is suggested that generating novel contextual understanding can "enhance theory building, deepen our appreciation of embedded management practices in more diverse territories, and open up new lines of inquiry", it is also recognised that it is "challenging social science research" (Morley & Heraty, 2019, p. 341). Some of this attendant complexity, and how it might be more fully captured has been articulated by Shapiro *et al.* (2007, p.129) where they suggest the necessity for polycontextually sensitive approaches capable of unearthing "multiple and qualitatively different contexts embedded within one another." They identify a series of seven categories of context and a range of variables relating to each that may be more or less prevalent, depending on the setting in which the research is being conducted. This range of categories of contextual variables identified, which serve as what the authors refer to as "ways of knowing" (p. 132), encompass temporal-spacial, environmental, cultural, psychological, philosophical, communication and sensory, various combinations and permutations of which may apply. These can be regarded as "useful sense making prompts for the researcher trying to understand different contextual phenomena" and may serve to open the researcher's "senses to new contextualities generally omitted from organizational research" (p. 147).

In a recent treatise published in European Management Review on contextual expertise and theory development in management, Gümüsay and Amis (2021) underscore how the landscape of research in particular projects is essential to theoretical development based on empirical insights. They also note that the investigators rarely engage with the complexities of the settings in which they conduct research, which may include "culture, field, history, or language" (Gümüsay & Amis, 2021, p. 11). Sometimes, it appears that the management community is biased towards aspirations of realising what Windelband (1998, p. 13) has referred to as nomothetic formulations that allow the development of formal laws abstracted from general patterns similar to those found in the natural sciences. While nomothetic formulations have their place and remain, there is equal room for idiographic investigations. These provide insights into the particular characteristics of a phenomenon in specific cultural contexts are more likely to be commonplace and in need of understanding. As Gümüsay and Amis (2021, pp. 9-10) advise, the importance of the specific cultural contexts often only become apparent during the processes of evidence collection or data analysis. A European community of engaged scholars has both a requirement to – and a capacity for – being sensitive to the influence of the context as it arises and Gümüsay and Amis (2021, pp. 17-20) provide guidance on how this may be achieved.

LANGUAGE

The role of English as the lingua franca of publication has the potential to discriminate against those who do not have English as their first language (Gantman *et al*., 2015; González-Alcaide *et al*., 2012; Özbilgin, 2014; Pascale, 2016). In a community in which many languages are spoken, it is important to reflect on this issue. Despite assumptions in some quarters that there is a formal language equivalence that facilitates an unproblematic literal translation, or a functional equivalence where the meanings of sentences may be represented in different languages without direct literal translation (Nida, 1964), there is now recognition that the same text may be translated in different ways depending on the purpose of the translation (Reiss & Vemeer, 1984/ 2013). Indeed, Xian (2008) – who worked as a translator before becoming an academic – has reported how translation is invariably an act of sensemaking which requires interpretation by the translator. Thus, while language is a facilitator of communication, it also sets parameters for our understanding of the world, creating a need for what has been referred to recently as our linguistic positionality and the biases in our understanding arising from our language (Gümüsay & Amis, 2021, p. 15). When it is acknowledged that there is not direct correspondence between different languages, it is easy to understand that even – or especially – in the academic world, multilingualism should be a source of new knowledge as it allows for the bringing of different frames of meaning to a situation.

Unfortunately – and quite paradoxically –in the academic publishing world, a strength of multilingualism often materialises in a disadvantage for those who enjoy that strength. It appears incumbent on a journal belonging to a multilingual community to seek to open opportunities for those who have the competence of two or more languages, to utilise those different languages in ways that help to add to the knowledge of the broader community. There are many ways in which such a benefit might be realised. These extend to the collection and analysis of evidence. Gümüsay *et al*., (2020) have described how varying degrees of multilingualism in both participants at research sites and within research teams in their institutions can help to bring out nuances in language that permit insights into the organizational phenomenon being studied. Studies conducted in different languages involving teams with variations in degrees of language skills and the consequences which that has on the research could make interesting manuscripts. The process of translation of research into the lingua franca may also add to plurality in interesting ways. An obvious example between some European languages and English is that the latter does not gender many nouns, adjectives, and prefixes. This raises evident questions about whether issues of inclusion and diversity in management phenomena – which have important gender considerations – are in any way affected by gendering or its absence in language. Considerations of the impact of such characteristics of languages on understanding of phenomena that have been studied and the extent to which the lingua franca is failing to capture aspects of a phenomenon could help us all to understand our own linguistic positionality.

Another way in which we may become a more pluralist community through affording greater respect to the differences between the languages of members of our community is by demonstrating proper respect to original works. Many European classical theorists whose works are used in research by management scholars, did not write those works in English. As already noted, translations from one language to another, inevitably involves a degree of interpretation. Many academics have only read the English translations of such work. They are, thus, only realising the benefit of the original work through the mind of the translator.

Authors who are able to read classical texts in the original language in which they are written may offer a different interpretation that provides unique insights, both into the classical text and into the management phenomenon being studied, if they explain the nuances of the original work that they have obtained through reading the work in the original language. It is not only by using the classical texts in the original language that could help in the development of a uniquely European plurality, but more broadly, plurality may be achieved if authors cast their net widely when reviewing background literature and not be afraid of citing lesser-known authors who have not written in English, but who may have something original to contribute both to the manuscript being prepared and to our knowledge more widely.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

Any research is informed by philosophical assumptions about epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Although some sets of assumptions – particularly logical-positivism – may dominate in some disciplines and geographical territories and be favoured by some other management journals, a wide range of philosophical and theoretical positions have emerged in management and cognate disciplines internationally (e.g., Bonache & Festing, 2020; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hassard, 1991; Huehn, 2008; Seeck & Laakso, 2010; Shepherd & Challenger, 2013; Sułkowski, 2010). European Management Review is interested in accommodating well-written work from all paradigmatic positions. Manuscripts that provide new insights from philosophical standpoints that may have been marginalised and thus uncommon in sub-disciplines of management where other philosophical standpoints dominate and are not found regularly in the journals of those sub-disciplines, are welcome. Empirical studies are welcome from teams where a genuine mixed method framework has been adopted and evidence has been collected and/ or analysed from standpoints that view the world through distinctively different philosophical lenses of each team member, as are manuscripts that seek to merge or utilize different paradigms in intelligible and novel ways (e.g., Bryant & Laskey, 2007; Schultz & Hatch, 1996). Morley & Heraty (2019) have suggested that collaborations of this nature are increasing in business scholarship, and they highlight two reasons which may account for this development. From a philosophical perspective, they suggest that they may be viewed as a fundamental effort towards enhancing theory building, while from an historical perspective, they suggest that they may serve as important conduits to more fully landscaping contextual features of business practice in numerous territories that have not been fully incorporated into the body of knowledge.

The provenance of our journal is European, but it belongs in a wider context of the world. Many scholars now based in Europe have ancestry from other parts of the world and are conversant with non-Western philosophical standpoints. The sharing of such ideas has already begun in several journals with the elaboration of ideas from a range of cultures. The post-colonial literature is a case in point (e.g., Alcadipani *et al*, 2012; Henry & Pene, 2001; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Nkomo, 2011; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012). As Alcadipani *et al.* (2012, p. 131) in their contribution on Southern voices in management and organization knowledge remind us “there is life beyond Northern academia, both in terms of management theoretical concepts and in terms of organizational practices”. The indigenous management literature serves as another case in point. Focused on unearthing ‘local phenomena’, Van de Ven & Jing (2012, p. 124) highlight that it seeks to “develop management knowledge that expresses and celebrates the unique contexts and settings of different countries and regions.” They also remind us that the “scientific community is not monolithic, and the West has no monopoly rights in defining scientific theories, methods, and institutions.” As a consequence, they suggest that “instead of homogenizing management research by trying to adapt and apply foreign theories and methods that are not sensitive to local contexts, we should encourage its heterogeneity by developing indigenous management theories, methods, and institutions”.

DESIGN FEATURES

As indicated above, European Management Review is interested in understanding both general phenomena and the unique qualities of particular instances. Consequently, both the usefulness of survey research for providing evidence of trends and statistical generalizability and the importance of individual cases for providing unique insights will be valued equally. While some others have shown a tendency to dismiss the latter as simply anecdotal outweighed in importance by the number of apparently more commonplace occurrences, the individual case will be valued as one from which much may be learned. This is particularly the case in a community as diverse as the European Academy of Management, where history and geography produce the diverse contexts for research alluded to above. Thus, while well-designed large-scale surveys are encouraged, so too are well-designed cases that add to our understanding of the 'particular'. Here the 'particular' may cover a country, a region within a country, an industry or simply a single site. Similarly, design of projects that compare two or more of any of the above, to use the similarities and differences in cases to proffer explanations of why the world of management is as it is, are also welcome.

It follows from our recognition of the importance of the particular that precedence will not be given to sets of criteria associated with one particular philosophical position or another and then expect work written from other viewpoints to comply with those criteria such as by viewing cases as important only if they add to generalizability of different types (e.g., Gibbert *et al*., 2008), or judging qualitative research by the number of interviews conducted (e.g., Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Instead, considerations appropriate to the design of the research and the empirical evidence collected will be applied, so particular theorizations of the individual case studied rather than its relationship to others will be valued (Stake, 1995) and the methods used will be assessed according to their fit with purpose and capability of generating the appropriate quality of evidence (e.g., Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Pratt, 2009). Of course, where criteria related to coverage in numbers, such as tests of statistical significance in survey design are important, they will be considered.

COLLECTION METHODS

Different histories and disciplines result in predilections for methods varying. Academics in marketing may have a predilection for focus groups, those in industrial psychology often engage with experiments, while scholars interested in corporate governance or finance will often obtain some of their information from databases. Management phenomena are often multilevel and multidimensional, synthesising a range of different qualities. Some of these may be measurable such as relative levels of costs, rewards, and remuneration, while others are not and require access to inner meanings of participants. Some forms of evidence providing insights into management phenomena are freely available and situated in the public domain, while others are guarded closely by the organizations in which they are situated. Some of the forms of available evidence are stored orderly and have been catalogued while other forms of evidence are dispersed and are heavily dependent on the researcher's capacity to bring order to them. European Management Review has always welcomed empirical studies that use any method and any combination of methods. To echo what has been written above about philosophical standpoints, studies that utilise methods that have been marginalised and are uncommon in sub-disciplines of management and are not found regularly in the journals of those sub-disciplines, are welcome. What is important is that the information collected is shown to be convincing by authors explaining clearly how the evidence was gathered and the relationship that this evidence has to the objectives of the research that was undertaken.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Studies that apply standard procedures consistent with how a research project was conceived at the outset, to realise conventional understandings of rigour will continue to be welcomed. However, academic research, like most other activities of humankind, is a social activity. As such, it is full of events that cannot be controlled wholly or that have significance that is not recognised immediately. Sometimes the importance of individual cases only become clear at the analysis stage. So, while manuscripts that have analysed evidence to provide an overview of longstanding trends remain valuable, those that are able to pick out what may be salient and important emergent trends from part of the evidence and can set it against the context of broader setting not reflective of perceived wisdom will also be valuable. Llewellyn and Northcott (2007) provide an exemplary example of this in their report of how just one participant in their research into New Public Management in hospitals was able to perceive an impact of averaging out of performance from changes in the financial model. Other issues that are sometimes noticed at the analysis stage of research is how the same evidence base or data set may be explored using different analytic methods. As Cassell and Bishop (2019) have reported, novel insights may be found from each different method. So, while manuscripts that are able to comply with – and apply rigorously – a single standard method are welcome, divergence will also be celebrated. Bansal & Corley (2011, p. 236) succinctly note that what is required from authors is to convey "the who, what, where, when, and how in such a way that the reader sees clearly how the researcher moved from the raw data to the theoretical insight" regardless of how their approach may diverge from standard procedures.

CONCLUSION

European Management Review is unique in being the journal that belongs to a European-wide organization that spans the entire range of management disciplines. While this presents challenges of how best to accommodate the full range of research manifest in such heterogeneity, the inherent plurality that this often entails must be viewed as a strength. There may be institutional forces that help to shape our experiences and provide some nomothetic trends to enable us to learn from our similarities, so there will continue to be a need for good survey research that can help to understand the extent of those similarities. However, it is also important that our differences are recognised, articulated, and understood. In this regard, no difference may be deemed insignificant, no lens for framing and understanding that difference should be considered valueless and no approach to discovering empirical reality – however that may be defined – should be prejudged so long as it represents good problem-methodological fit. We have highlighted some of the differences of which we are aware. The articulation of these runs the risk of trivialising or marginalising others. That is not our intention and so we encourage you to submit manuscripts to European Management Review that capture any bases for difference in order to provide the community with the opportunity to benefit from your knowledge.

European Management Review is a journal that has different sections; namely, the general section and Methodology Matters. In addition to encouraging plurality, it is also especially interested in innovation in method. It is, thus, not only possible to report on whichever method you have used to produce your insights when writing a manuscript reporting on empirical research for the general section, but if an approach has been genuinely innovative which others may learn from, an additional contribution on that method may be suitable for the Methodology Matters section. Particular guidance on writing a manuscript that makes a methodological contribution for the Methodology Matters section may be found in Lee (2020).

The recognition that plurality is a strength requires supportive practices. European Management Review is – and will continue to be –a journal that allows the authors to nominate a reviewer, so if your research and its strengths are known only by a small community so far, you may nominate reviewers and the journal will aim to choose one of them alongside others in order to obtain a rounded view that will help the journal to achieve the plurality that it seeks. The journal is just one of the constituent parts of the European Academy of Management. Other constituent parts include its national representatives and strategic interest groups (SIGs) that cover particular sub-disciplines within the management domain and it urges the national representatives and officers of the SIGs to think about ways in which they might help to support the work that researchers are conducting within their geographical or intellectual domain and work with the journal to bring that work to the attention of a wider audience through European Management Review. Discussions are welcome with national representatives and officers of SIGs on how this may be achieved in order that we might more fully exploit the opportunities inherent in realising and delivering on the promise and the potential of a more pluralistic scholarship.

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