

On legacies and linkages: A publishing manifesto

This first issue of 2022 sees us commence our mandate as Co-Editors-in-Chief of *European Management Review* (EMR). We are honoured to be assuming this role. We are also aware of the accompanying responsibilities and challenges.

As with all journals, ours is a truly collective enterprise. In building the team for the next 3 years, we sought to assemble a cohort of committed leading and emerging scholars, and we are truly delighted with the response that we have received. We want to take this opportunity to place on record our sincere thanks to all of the scholars who have agreed to join us, work with us and support EMR, whether as Editors, Consulting Editors, Members of the Scientific Committee or Members of the Editorial board. It is with high confidence and genuine curiosity that we look forward to building for the future and harvesting the fruits of this collective and *outreaching* effort. After all, it is said, in uncertain ventures, it is wiser to bet on the jockey more than on the horse!

This editorial is about how we think EMR can contribute to improving management publication in the course of improving itself; it is intended to be a positional statement or manifesto about editorial approaches, about the publishing process and about some of the methodological features of our field. In fact, one of these challenges to be faced is a broadly perceived need for the renewal of the governance of management publishing in general, on which a critical discussion is emerging (captured in a recent position statement by the International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management) (IFSAM, 2021). We address the renewal and the development of the potential of EMR as a scholarly outlet in that more general frame of the development of the management field.

This is the result of a deliberate choice: We designedly elected not to write an editorial setting out research agendas which scholars might embrace, nor one offering prescriptions regarding where the field should go in substantial terms. Our decision has deeper roots than just the institutional link of the journal to a large scholarly association, which of course requires a certain ecumenism. It is also and especially due to a methodological option that we espouse: As expressed in a lesser promulgated Popperian piece, we believe that the critical method has more to offer than the myth of leadership (Popper, 1989); and we find it honest to apply to ourselves what we recommend to others regarding the management of innovation, that is, let a thousand flowers bloom. Concomitantly, we think it is our task and duty to take a

position with respect to approaches to publishing in management, highlighting what we see as different complementary roles of different journals, what unexplored territories may be worth a visit on that map and what publishing limitations and constraints that the broad field of management might usefully try to overcome.

Academic journals in our field have multiple functions, including communicating knowledge, debating ideas and theories, contributing to solving real world problems and legitimating the quality of scientific output. Of particular note, the latter function has grown in importance as a result of the increasing reliance on the use of publications in journals with a particular ranking for selection, tenure and promotion decisions. In recognising this, it is important that we try not to lose sight also of all the other functions and that we strive to stimulate a virtuous circle between the range of functions that they serve. Thus, for example, the publishing of interesting discussions and informative pieces may raise the impact of the journal and in turn attract more high-quality contributions from younger scholars for whom the formal ranking of a journal is especially important.

We acknowledge the applied nature of the management field, along with the interdisciplinary origins from which it springs. A fuller reacknowledgement of these may be warranted. It is for this reason that we are resolved to give space to reflections and contributions on management and the social sciences. More specifically, some of the major areas in which we wish to make advances are signalled by the dedicated Consulting Editors who join us here at EMR. By any yardstick, these are scholars who have championed and mastered the management–social science nexus. In this effort, in addition to curating insights from the more classically explored nexuses between management and economics or sociology, we call for the building of bridges between less championed but highly impactful nexuses between management and law, along with the nexus between management and history and philosophy, which can also serve as a source of much wisdom.

There are different ways of usefully developing management knowledge. In particular, the production of that knowledge can be more specialist or more generalist, more theoretical or more empirical, more interpretative or more prescriptive. It is therefore necessary and indeed healthy that in the publishing ecosystem, different journals will position themselves in different ways on those dimensions. The positioning of EMR on this

landscape, as signalled in the new Aims & Scope, is first and foremost as a generalist journal in terms of both methods and subfield integration. Second, going back to Thompson's (1956) foundational essay in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, trying to define the field of administrative science, the position of management with respect to the social sciences can be seen as somewhat analogous to that of engineering to the physical sciences or medicine to the biological sciences. Viewed in this way, we are interested in both diagnosis and prescription for improving the health of organizations and institutions; and we are interested in both analysis and design—the *shaping*, even the invention of organizations and institutions, ‘the world as it might be’ (Simon, 1969)—and this interest is signalled by including also ‘Management and Design Sciences’ as a nexus followed by a dedicated Consulting Editor.

Against the backdrop of what can be achieved by any single journal, we shall also seek to apply this improvement logic to how we govern the knowledge production process itself. Our aim here is to contribute to overcoming some of the problems and fill some of the gaps in the current management publishing landscape, which, in combination, serve to constrain knowledge gains. These are highlighted and structured in the following four major issues.

Siloes and links. All of us recognise the potential knowledge gains that accompany specialisation. Such specialisation holds the prospect of boosting the production of more precise and profound knowledge. However, as we have come to understand, it can also harbour proverbial drawbacks, including much duplication of effort and the losing sight of interaction effects. The positioning of EMR in this respect, being a general management journal, is to contribute to *linking* and integrating management subfields and to connecting them to pertinent social science foundations. This is especially relevant for research domains that have become compartmentalised or even divorced to quite a large extent, despite being concerned with highly intertwined issues, if not with the same ones. Examples here might include all the subfields concerning the central problem of work: how to govern employment relations and human resource investment and deployment with an understanding of the relevant social, economic and legal implications; how to design the organisation of work drawing on insights from occupational psychology and organisational behaviour; or the analysis and design of governance and organisational structures, highly interdependent but rarely jointly considered in ‘reforms’ and proposed changes; or how to foster and govern entrepreneurship leveraging pertinent tools from governance and organisation theory.

Self-referentiality and conformism. We tend to talk to ourselves. Authors are asked ‘to join some discourse’. Problems are generated far too often by ‘gaps in the literature’ without asking whether it is worthwhile to fill them. This

is not a quest of ‘relevance’ as opposed to ‘rigour’ as it has become common to frame it. Basic research and abstract analysis, with as of yet unknown applications, is fundamental. However, high potential problem formulation is not necessarily, and not even usually, driven by common discourses. Rather, it is often driven by counterfactual and counter-intuitive questions, or by the lack of knowledge and tools for solving real problems such as, for example, as we saw recently, how to take rational and fair decisions in the context of the unfolding pandemic. Tools are missing also because there is no ‘discourse’ about them. Hence, rather than posing questions such as ‘which discourse are you joining’, we may more fruitfully ask ‘what new knowledge are you adding’, whether small or large, conceptual or empirical. In this, the opening of new discourses is especially welcome.

The ‘grand innovation syndrome’ and theory proliferation. It is unrealistic to pretend that each article worth publishing will make a highly innovative contribution. As Herbert Simon (1977) observed, any sensible approach to innovation takes into account that it is a rare event. In other words, there is a lot of knowledge that can be valuable even if classified as incremental. We should recognise its place in leveraging collective effort, in revising and improving parts of received theory and wisdom, in offering new evidence contributing to the growth of knowledge, and in paving of the way towards eventual more radical innovation.

The rather widespread push for ‘making a strong theoretical advance’, ‘offering an original contribution’, ‘saying something different from others’ and demanding grand innovations in every single manuscript has the undesirable effect of generating a proliferation of theories and labels in management scholarship. Too often, though, what is offered is not a new theory, but a rediscovery or relabelling of aspects of the known. This phenomenon has been lamented for quite some time and has also served to constrain progress. As Hauge Fabian (2000, p. 366) succinctly put it, ‘a proliferation of theoretical perspectives without any cohesion leaves researchers unable to discern the pragmatic “what’s what?”’ Indeed, it may also be seen as one of the reasons why the impact of management on important decision making is weaker than it could be, as its knowledge is perceived as less reliable than others when important decisions are in order. Hence, we welcome honest, transparent, replicable studies, along with replications themselves. We also welcome patient theory reappraisals and refinements leading to a higher degree of cumulation of knowledge. We are confident that on that basis, some contributions will be sometimes able to offer major steps forward in the growth of knowledge.

Investments and risk bearing in the publication process. There seems to be widespread dissatisfaction among all of us as authors about some diffused practices in the

management of academic journal editorial processes, often with good reason. One key issue in this respect is that the bulk of the risk involved is transferred to authors: Journals often demand substantial journal-specific, or even reviewer-specific, investments by the authors, along many rounds of revisions lasting sometimes for years, and not so rarely ending up with a rejection decision. As management experts, we should be able to see that such a governance process is far too shaped by asymmetrical bargaining power and is rather inefficient. Fortunately, this is an aspect that can be modified by actors in charge: Hence, EMR simply commits to trying to avoid this. Manuscript reviewing can be seen as a process of co-investment by journal and authors, similar to what occurs in developing projects with uncertain outcomes. The journal takes some risk (e.g. especially unwittingly rejecting good projects) at the pre-review evaluation stage: Some Type I errors will certainly be made, but judgements regarding inadequacies are much more easily made than judgements concerning potential. On the latter issue, we envisage that the key milestone going forward will revolve around the first revision: that should provide the core evidence on the potential of a paper/project. If the judgement is positive, from that stage on, it seems fair and efficient that the journal co-invests with the authors for the purposes of trying to ensure that a manuscript develops a trajectory arising from the review process and can be brought successfully through to publication. This process can, in part at least, be safeguarded by working to ensure that the decision role rests primarily with Editors, who proactively and selectively integrate the critical comments provided by reviewers whose role is to advise. On occasion, where there are knowledge gains to be made and of course where reviewers are willing and interested, there may be an opportunity for ‘Comments’ to become ‘Commentaries’, published next to a manuscript. An opportunity of this nature would constitute, especially for younger reviewers, a non-distorting incentive to more readily accept the task of serving as a reviewer. It could also help in securing high-quality comments, focused on a critical analysis (which may be hard on problems but may be generative of knowledge), rather than focusing on evaluative judgements and decisions.



Thus far, we have focused on management, but there is another key appellation in the title of this journal—‘European’. That qualification also merits some reflection, as it can be interpreted in different ways, and indeed, it has been so in the history of European journals. More precisely, the term has been sometimes interpreted, we hope mostly in the past, in an adversarial way, or even driven by reciprocal stereotyping, especially between alleged different ‘views’ or ‘approaches’ characteristic of ‘American’ versus ‘European’ thinking. Hopefully, one benefit of globalisation, including in scientific work, is the decline and evaporation of such interpretations. There is no such thing as a European science different

from science which has its origins in other parts of the world. We are all participating in the same international conferences and associations, exchanging knowledge across borders and co-authoring papers across continents. Rather, there are particular legacies and more or less favourable opportunities for the study of certain phenomena that may be differently distributed across the world—a feature that can only be beneficial for reciprocal learning and the overall expansion and growth of knowledge. As far as Europe is concerned, as we briefly state in the Aims & Scope of the journal, a special legacy may be seen in its millenary cultural heritage, going back to the ancient civilizations around the Mediterranean sea—where by the way historians have located things such as the ‘invention of enterprise’ (Landes et al., 2010) or the earliest forms of large-scale organisation, like the Egyptian organisation of construction works, or of food storage (Tosi & Carrol, 1976). And a special opportunity may be seen in the fact that Europe is a community of entities (‘entities’, ‘states’ and ‘institutions’ all derive from the Latin verb *esse*, ‘to be’) with highly differentiated history, cultures and institutions, integrated in (and in search of) a common governance ... perhaps something that should be interesting for anyone in management ...

This said, there are many ways of interpreting legacies, and, in these dark days of war in Europe, we cannot remain entirely silent on the devastation unfolding before us, nor to refer to a simplistic and rosy picture of Europe. The conflict actually reopens the Pandora’s box of the dark, obscurantist spirits in our midst, along with the bright, illuminist and libertarian ones. This tension between two views of societies—particularly relevant for an intellectual enterprise like a journal—has been well described in cultural and historical terms in a very recent commentary in a major Italian newspaper (Polito, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 March 2022): ‘One vision conceives society as a mechanism for guaranteeing the freedom of individuals to conduct the life they wish. Instead in the Kremlin rhetoric, we hear the echo of an idea of nation as a living organism, pursuing a single common goal rooted in its history’, where ‘the spiritual unity of a nation permeates all the manifestations of society. The two thought traditions are heirs of Illuminism and Romanticism, both present in the European culture, which Russian culture is part of’. Choices must be made, and, of course, we choose the illuminist, pluralist, critical tradition; and we hope that EMR will be seen as a receptive home for all scholars across the world sharing and safeguarding this spirit.

KEYWORDS

management scholarship, methodology, publishing, Europe

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