

Special Issue Call for Papers

## Advancing Research Methodologies in Management Scholarship

Paper submission deadline: 1 September 2021

Guest Editors

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### **Background:**

Empirical methods, both quantitative and qualitative, have a long history and tradition in management research. Drawing on functionalism and positivism, quantitative scholars have utilized a range of research designs for testing and measuring phenomena in the management field, including surveys, experiments, structured observations, and panel studies. Such data are commonly analysed through regression and path analysis. On the other hand, interpretive-driven qualitative researchers, seeking rich insights and meanings around managerial phenomena, have drawn on research designs such as case studies, ethnography, action research, and grounded theory (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2020; Ji *et al.*, 2019; Welch *et al.*, 2011). Studies frequently use qualitative data gathering techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and unstructured observations (Hennink *et al.*, 2020; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Scholars typically rely on sensemaking analytical processes such as thematic analysis, narrative, discourse, and interpretive phenomenological methods to analyse and present such data. Mixed methods, by comparison, have only some presence in management research. Emphasizing methodological pluralism and triangulation, mixed-method approaches can provide complementary insights into empirical phenomena and enhance data validity (Molina-Azorín, 2012; Turner, Cardinal and Burton, 2017) if their philosophical and methodological challenges can be overcome.

Despite these developments, however, management research is still defined by numerous tensions and debates, which diminish the diversity and trustworthiness of research methodologies in the field. This proposal highlights four significant debates featured in articles published in the *British Journal of Management*, and whose resolution is significant for advancing management scholarship. First, perhaps the most long-standing debate, which has been extended in the management field by other disciplines, is the quantitative-qualitative research dichotomy (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Misconceptions feed this debate on the “robustness” of qualitative research and the seeming preference that gatekeepers within specific management fields and journals hold towards quantitative methodologies (Bell *et al.*, 2017; Hewlett and Brown, 2018; Pratt, Kaplan and Whittington, 2020). While qualitative methods are acknowledged for their value across management fields, certain fields such as finance and accounting are traditionally quantitative oriented. Many prestigious journals are guided by the positivist paradigm and exhibit a clear preference towards quantitative studies

(Bell *et al.*, 2017). For a multidisciplinary and general management journal such as *BJM*, the question should not be over the value or merits of one methodological alternative over another but over their complementarity and appreciation of different criteria employed to enhance the trustworthiness of findings in naturalistic inquiry or positivism. This SI contributes to this timely debate by encouraging new ways of thinking and communicating rigour in quantitative and qualitative research, which recognise the strength of these methodological alternatives addressing this counter-productive methodological divide (Pratt, Kaplan and Whittington, 2020).

A second traditional tension is on the legitimacy and importance of mixed methods as a management research methodology. While mixed-method approaches are gaining (some) more acceptance in the field (Brennecke, 2020; Gover, Halinski and Duxbury, 2016; Molina-Azorin, 2012), they continue to face skepticism from scholars more familiar to the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy (Modell, 2009; Berthod, Grothe-Hammer and Sydow, 2017; Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). The capacity of mixed-method approaches to combine two conflicting epistemological paradigms is a key reason for the criticism this methodology receives (Modell, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2017). We suggest that the metaphor of methodological bricolage (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2020) can be extended to mixed methods research and further explored in this SI as a means of combining alternative methodological lenses.

A third long-standing debate in management research concentrates on the rigour-relevance tension (Bell *et al.*, 2017; Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017; Wright, 2011). The tendency to isolate rigorous from relevant studies has limited new approaches that can combine the two, thus, shifting the field towards less diversity and pluralism (Ashworth, McDermott and Currie, 2019). Rigour relates to methodological soundness, while relevance centres on the relevance of findings for managers and other practitioners in management (Gulati, 2007; Latusek and Vlaar, 2015; Parry *et al.*, 2020). While many researchers in the field of management have invested in rigorous methodologies and studies, they have been highly criticized that the theories they produced are not relevant and thus unimportant to management practice (Latusek and Vlaar, 2015; Kelemen and Bansal, 2002). A central argument of scholars that argue for relevance is that management research should be relevant at the expense of rigour (Ashworth *et al.*, 2019; Gulati, 2007), which becomes a source of long-lasting tension in the field. Bridging this gap invites researchers to engage in “bilingual interpreting” (Gulati, 2007), clarifying findings and communicating them to the research participant and practitioner audiences. Our goal is to revisit what Wright (2011) refers to as “committed-to-participants-research” and explore different epistemological assumptions, theorising and reporting styles in management scholarship that makes it possible and valuable.

A fourth tension, which limits methodological diversity in the field is the lack of innovation in management research methodologies. Despite the presence of an abundant methodological choices, the management field continues to rely on the disciplinary convention that proliferates dominant quantitative and qualitative practices with not much emphasis on new analytical approaches and research designs (van Burg *et al.*, 2020; Robinson and Kerr, 2015). While prominent scholars in management have argued for methodological pluralism, many top management journals are still biased towards the preference of specific traditional research designs that they conceive as more robust (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2018). Over the years, a set of expectations and standards has shaped the field’s data collecting and analysing practices and thus its theorising. Quantitative studies are also expected to draw on robust statistical techniques such as multiple regressions, the reporting of p-values, and the running of coefficient and multicollinearity tests (Dutt and Joseph, 2019; Julian and Ofori-dankwa, 2013; Karim, Manab and Ismail, 2020). Similarly, in qualitative studies, much preference is attributed to methodological templates (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989) as a response to the recent

“replication crisis” in the field (Pratt, Kaplan and Whittington, 2020). Methodological innovation in the form of new analytical approaches, research designs, machine learning and cognitive systems “allow scholars to address old questions in new ways and to investigate questions that were not tractable using existing methods” (Arora *et al.*, 2016, p.37). Our goal in extending the call for papers is to encourage methodological innovations that expand the questions management scholars may ask and improve the trustworthiness of their answers.

Contributors in this special issue are invited to join critical discussions and debates in management, which can help advance management scholarship on several fronts. We are raising a call to reconsider existing debates, standards and practices to facilitate improvements, which can advance management research. We encourage papers that make choices on research design, sampling, validity and measurement, transparency and accountability, data collection, and analytical approaches, which delve beyond the ‘convention’ and ‘standard’ in the management field and set the grounds for establishing more novel and trustworthy research and theorising (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021). To achieve this, management researchers are encouraged to problematise taken-for-granted assumptions and research traditions in the management field. Further, we encourage management scholars to delve beyond the narrow field of management to identify alternative and novel research methods.

### *Aim and scope*

This SI aims to offer a unique and timely opportunity to explore, revisit and critically examine these methodological tensions in the management scholarship with the purpose of advancing diversity and novel theorising in the field. We expect contributors to provide suggestions for solving these tensions and pave the way for open and inclusive theorising in management scholarship. Our special issue establishes topic clusters with proposed research topics, which can contribute to these debates and advance the field of management research.

We welcome empirical, conceptual and methodological papers, which respond to these methodological debates in management research. Papers that introduce improved and novel empirical methodologies considering new technologies and draw on cross-disciplinary methods are highly encouraged. Based on the above aims, we invite papers in four topic clusters, which correspond to the need to revisit the methodological tensions addressed in this Special Issue.

**1. Revisiting the quantitative-qualitative research dichotomy:** we seek contributions that advance practices of quantitative and qualitative research and challenge the divide between these two methodological approaches. Possible topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Enhancing methodological trustworthiness in qualitative data analysis
- Using qualitative research for theory testing, contextualised explanation and causal inferences
- Revisiting data collection and analysis practices qualitative research
- Rethinking quantitative and qualitative sampling techniques
- Improving quality criteria in quantitative and qualitative research
- Considering methods for avoiding bias in quantitative research
- Discussing ethical and accountability practices in quantitative and qualitative research
- Creating more robust standards for methods drawing on narratives, metaphors, and storytelling

**2. Revising mixed-methodologies in management:** we seek contributions that meaningfully combine quantitative and qualitative research. Possible topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Overcoming scepticism and elevating the standards and rigour of mixed-methods research
- Employing bricolage approaches to mixed methods research
- Employing multi-modality in mixed methods research
- Using holistic triangulation and theory development through mixed method research

**3. Bridging relevance and rigor in management:** we seek contributions concerned with advances in methods and standards to balance rigour and relevance in management studies. Possible topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Advancing methodologies balancing rigour and relevance (e.g. engaged scholarship)
- Creating managerially useful knowledge through ‘dialogical sensemaking’ and other ‘engaged research’ approaches
- Generating knowledge through joint academic-practitioner research methodologies
- Employing rigorously relevant action research
- Using new methods for bridging applied and pure research gap

**4. Innovative research methodologies in management:** we seek contributions that propose innovative to management scholarship research designs and practices including data collection, sampling, and analysis. Possible topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Implicating artificial intelligence in data analysis in management studies
- Using of data mining and genetic algorithms in panel data analysis
- Rethinking big data sampling in empirical studies
- Introducing novel ways to qualitative inquiry
- Employing cognitive networks applied in management studies
- Using social network designs in management studies
- Introducing novel ways of analysing text and interview data
- Considering new research designs for more robust mixed method research
- Modernizing survey designs
- Introducing new measurement techniques in empirical studies
- Revisiting case study research
- Revisiting structured observational research designs
- Improving reporting practices in quantitative and qualitative research

### Submission Information

- The deadline for submissions is 1 September 2021.
- Authors should ensure they adhere to the journal author guidelines which are available at: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html).
- Submissions should be uploaded to the *British Journal of Management* ScholarOne Manuscripts site at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bjm>. Authors should select ‘special issue paper’ as the paper type, ensure they answer ‘yes’ to the question ‘Is

this submission for a special issue?’ and enter the title of the special issue in the box provided.

- Papers will be reviewed according to the *British Journal of Management* blind review process.
- Informal enquiries relating to the Special Issue, proposed topics and potential fit with the Special Issue objectives are welcomed. Please direct any questions to the Guest Editors:

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