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The Call for Responsible Research in Business and Management

Theories greatly influence business and management practices. In his seminal work the late London Business School professor Sumantra Ghoshal (2005) warned that bad management theories are destroying good management practices. Similarly, good management theories may help to bring forth new and better business practices.

One of the most influential moral philosophers of our time, Hans Jonas (1984) suggested that responsibility should be understood as caring for the beings whose functioning is under one's action and consideration. From Jonas' theory of responsibility it follows that business and management researchers should not be passive observers of the subjects they study. Rather, responsible scholars should develop sensitivity and responsiveness toward the fate and well-being of organizations and other social systems they happen to focus on.

In 2017, Notre Dame University professor Anne Tsui initiated the creation of an international network of leading scholars and universities has been formed to promote *Responsible Research in Business and Management* (RRBM). The core vision of RRBM is that

> business can be a means for a better world if it is informed by responsible research. (...) Research is the foundation of business education and practice, yet business research has failed to live up to its promise in promoting better policies and best practices. If nothing is done, business research will lose its legitimacy at best; at worst, it will waste money, talent, and opportunity. (RBBM, 2019)

The voices of internal and external business school stakeholders (for example, Ghoshal, 2005; Segalla, 2008; Simons, 2012; Cannon, 2015; de Bettiginies, 2018; Elangovan, and Hoffman, 2019) have become increasingly strident in their challenges to the business research agenda.

Such voices convey a sense that perceived academic elitism, competition and imperialism has led to a multitude of ever-increasing 'cul-de-sacs' of knowledge creation which fail to translate appropriately and relevantly to knowledge dissemination. Despite grand objectives that point towards contemporary management needs, opportunities and challenges, the internal business academic scholarship system tends to promote self-service (Starbuck, 2007, p.24), rather than leading *responsibly* as a steward of knowledge creation, applied learning and impactful research.

Brannick and Coghlan's well-documented survey of the literature on the perceived relevance gap between academics and practitioners painted a disquieting picture in 2006. They noted that the business world appeared to be "generally ignoring the research and consequent knowledge produced by business schools or academia, since it feels it is irrelevant to its purposes" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2006, p.2). Publications in the field since then have continued to question the nature and relevance of business and management research and many scholars have shown support for the view expressed by the RBBM that although "research is the foundation of business education and practice, yet business research has failed to live up to its promise in promoting better policies and best practices" (RBBM, 2019). Business research questions, methods, predictions and prescriptions are perceived by practitioners, such as James Wallis in this volume, to reflect a *habitus* that does not reflect the kind of research insights that contemporary management needs. In Wallis's words, there is "a mismatch between the conventional concepts of business and the demands of sustainable change". He calls for a future paradigm of research and practice as "the natural and obvious path, as opposed the anomalous and exceptional one" (chapter yy).

The diagnosis for the flaws in the prevailing business and management research paradigm conditions frequently reference the over-arching demands of the academic journal ranking system in shaping research agendas and in maintaining particular forms of organisational and social scientific methodologies and theories. This has led to a narrowing frame of reference for discursive enquiry within business disciplines rather than towards an integration of business disciplines which align with the trend of companies to pursue agile strategies that integrate business functions (Visée, 2015).

Business and management scholarship tends to follow the conventions of other academies in aligning academic career development through journal publication filters. But, like the

engineering and technology academies, business schools are expected to create fundamental knowledge that can be applied to practice "in applied domains to address pressing and current issues" (RRBM, 2019). Managers require theory, design, concepts, modelling and research insights that help them to develop new markets and improve operational decision-making and processes. They also require more accessible and applied knowledge through business practitioner media.

The business management paradigm creates a tension for business scholars between their vocation to use management science to serve business and society and the business journal ranking system measures that appear as an unbending career master. Research quality and focus is measured by the number of A-level journal publications, h-index, citation scores, and the like at the risk of "using a language that broader audiences do not understand, publishing in journals that they don't read, and asking questions for which they have little concern" (Elangovan and Hoffman, 2019).

Responsible business research expressed in the seven RRBM Principles outlined below and the 'real' research needs of management face obfuscation by the idiosyncratic particularities and limitations of A-level journals which, as Adler and Harzburg point out,

> …neither claim to comprehensively include "the best of the best" nor do they inadvertently succeed in such a task. The journals included in the *FT*40 and the UTD lists, for example, are merely a sample of high-quality journals; they do not even attempt to represent (let alone equitably and comprehensively include) all 13 (AACSB-defined) disciplines associated with business. (Adler and Harzburg. 2009, p.76)[1]

Adler and Harzburg summarize a commonly expressed complaint by faculty that articles published in new journals remain invisible to most citation indices and to almost all ranking systems. The responsible research agenda requires new methods of scholarly assessment and success that include criteria that measure impact, systemic solutions and practitioner-

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[1] FT40 (now FT50) are the 50 business journals used by the Financial Times in compiling the FT Research rank included in the Global MBA, EMBA and Online MBA rankings. The UTD lists refer to the UT Dallas' Naveen Jindal School of Management's database which tracks publications in 24 leading business journals. AACSB provides quality assurance, business education intelligence, and professional development services to over 1,600 member organizations and more than 800 accredited business schools worldwide.

relevance. One way would be for business school faculty appointment committees in assessing candidates to give equal weight to the impact of their scholarship through the weighting of citations and articles in the practitioner press.

Business and management research can do much more to contribute solutions to the global challenges expressed by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, the RBBM formulated a Position Paper from April to September 2017 supported by 85 co-signers from over 75 institutions in 21 countries, representing senior scholars, deans, university and business leaders. The Paper sets a vision for the role of business schools in contributing to societal well-being and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It also sets out the Principles of Responsible Science that will "guide business and management research to build a sound body of knowledge that serves society" (RBBM, 2019). In summary form, the seven RBBM Principles for transforming business and management research are:

1. *Service to Society*: Development of knowledge that benefits business and the broader society, locally and globally, for the ultimate purpose of creating a better world.

2. *Stakeholder Involvement*: Research that engages different stakeholders in the research process, without compromising the independence of inquiry.

3. *Impact on Stakeholders*: Research that has an impact on diverse stakeholders, especially research that contributes to better business and a better world.

4. *Valuing Both Basic and Applied Contributions*: Contributions in both the theoretical domain to create fundamental knowledge and in applied domains to address pressing and current issues.

5. *Valuing Plurality and Multidisciplinary Collaboration*: Diversity in research themes, methods, forms of scholarship, types of inquiry, and interdisciplinary collaboration to reflect the plurality and complexity of business and societal problems.

6. *Sound Methodology*: Research that implements sound scientific methods and processes in both quantitative and qualitative or both theoretical and empirical domains.

7. *Broad Dissemination*: Diverse forms of knowledge dissemination that collectively advance basic knowledge and practice.

Based on the vision of the *Responsible Research in Business and Management* network this edited volume presents original, empirical and conceptual papers which address the challenges of doing responsible research in the business and management professions. Responsible research is not a specific research method, but is rather an integrative approach to research that emphasizes research outcomes and impacts that target ethical, sustainable and societal challenges.

Responsible research focuses on practice before discourse (Flyvbjerg, 2001) selecting and integrating different kinds of research methodologies. Rooney (2013), for example, has argued for wise research methodology that challenges standard approaches to management and organisational studies research "to do things better" by "being clear about the roles and relevance of one's dispositions and their recursive relationship with *habitus*, including cultural artefacts like knowledge and values". Ethnographic and praxeological narratives, discourse analysis, decision-making frameworks and visual methods that highlight data collection moments (Lehtonen in chapter yy) can offer alternative or complementary research routes to achieve impact and action. In their chapter, Molina-Azorin et al show through two research projects how mixed methods action-research approaches that use field experiments and multiple rounds of qualitative interviews produce research outcomes that align with the principles of responsible research. Quantitative studies require wise interpretation for relevancy and applicability; thus Rooney's cry for "phronesiology not epistemology" (Rooney, 2013, p.37), and Golden-Biddle and Bartunek's conception of relational objectivity grounded in responsibility to all parties involved in the research, which they describe in chapter yy.

Issues and Themes

In their chapter *Critical Realism: A Philosophy of Science for Responsible Business and Management Research* Tim Rogers (University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia) and Benito L. Teehankee (De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines) emphasize that a key motivator for the current detached approach to research in business and management is the prevailing positivist philosophy of science. The paper argues that critical realism as a philosophy of science provides an alternative ontology, epistemology, and axiology that can better ground responsible research in business and management.

Critical Realism was founded as a new philosophy of science by the British philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1975, 2016). It has had some traction among British management researchers. Recently, it has been gaining increasing coverage among American scholars in philosophy of management research and in evidence-based management. In contrast with positivism Critical Realism favors moving from the status quo towards achieving personal and organizational transformation: How can we be change agents for social and ecological welfare as we do research?

In his chapter, *Identifying and Solving the Right Problem by Using Multidimensional Systems Thinking*, Laszlo Zsolnai (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary) emphasizes that it is a serious failure of business and management researchers when they solve the wrong problem precisely. This means that their problem formulation is inadequate, which may lead to disastrous consequences for the well-being of the stakeholders. Zsolnai argues that to avoid substantive failures in problem formulation business and management researchers should reconsider their basic assumptions of the system under study and include as many stakeholders' views as possible. Appropriate solutions should address all the important dimensions of the problem in question (the scientific/technical, the interpersonal/social, the systemic/ecological, and the existential/spiritual), and create some optimal balance among them. Business and management researchers should also investigate their proposed solutions from a deontological point of view (i.e. which ethical norms are violated or satisfied by them?) as well as from a consequentialist point of view (i.e. what are the payoffs for different stakeholders?). Zsolnai suggests that the job of responsible business and management research is holistic problem solving and producing knowledge that is substantively adequate and ethically acceptable in broad socio-economic context.

In their chapter, *Objectivity as Responsibility in Management Research*, Karen Golden-Biddle (Boston University, USA) and Jean M. Bartunek (Boston College, USA) are drawing to the scholarship of the American philosopher, Lisa Heldke (2001), and assert that a transformed understanding of the role of objectivity in inquiry is required for researchers to conduct responsible research in business and management. They discuss the traditionally conceived concept of objectivity in management and social research, and develop an explicitly relational conception of objectivity as responsibility. They expand this conception by illuminating its relevance for inquiry processes within the context of management research. They draw on Heldke's notions of responsibility to and responsibility for, two central

implications of conceiving objectivity as responsibility. They also give some models and practices of approaches emphasizing the importance of mutual relationships in business and management research that show the possibility of responsible management research projects.

In his chapter, *Reflections on Standards for Responsible and High-Quality Business Research: A Call for Peace*, Tilman Bauer (Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland) presents a "mental map" of the interrelated nature of epistemic/scientific and non-epistemic/social values in responsible research which fulfills standards of high-quality scientific inquire and contributes positively to society. After giving an overview of the responsible research concept, Bauer juxtaposes its principles with standards of high-quality research. Finally, he argues that responsible business and management research may contribute to promoting peace in multidimensional context, including security, climate safety, the quest for truth, transpersonal experiences, and other issues related to the inner- and inter-personal functioning in society.

In their chapter, *Responsible Research and Diversity of Methods: Contributions of Mixed Methods Research for Better Business and a Better World*, José F. Molina-Azorin, Maria D. López-Gamero, Jorge Pereira-Moliner, Eva M. Pertusa-Ortega and Juan José Tarí (University of Alicante, Spain) advance the position that mixed methods research (the combination of quantitative and qualitative research in the same study or research project) can help to promote responsible research for better business and a better world. They emphasize that mixed methods can produce rigorous and quality research, and, at the same time, relevant, useful and actionable research. The paper analyzes the main paradigm characteristics of mixed methods regarding ontology, epistemology and axiology of this approach, emphasizing the potential of mixed methods research as a tool for social change. They present examples of works and research projects that use mixed methods and that promote better business and a better world by addressing grand challenges such as poverty and sustainability.

In his chapter, *From being observed to becoming an active participant: how visual research methods contribute to producing useful and credible knowledge*, Miikka J. Lehtonen (Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland) focuses on informant reflexivity in business and management research. Drawing on a longitudinal research project utilizing visual research methods paper shows how visual research methods can support informant reflexivity. Data for the project was collected in Helsinki, Finland by inviting video game industry professionals to visualize

their industry ecosystem. Responsibility in this context refers to the interpersonal dimension: how do management scholars engage in fieldwork with respondents that ensures knowledge flows between them and the respondents. Lehtonen argues that visual methods help the informants to make sense of and articulate their knowledge by breaking away from linguistic jargon, and the process of thinking through drawing already in itself is insightful for the informants.

In his chapter, *The Imperative of Sustainable Value Creation*, Adel Guitouni (Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria, Canada) aims to facilitate the development and diffusion of quality decision-making frameworks for sustainable value creation. Guitouni takes the view that sustainability and social responsibility of businesses should be founded on two critical concepts: inclusivity and reconciliation. The inclusivity is about being considered for all perspectives and beings, while reconciliation is about finding a 'comfortable decision-making zone' where competing objectives can be achieved without compromises. Guitouni suggests that these properties guide the development of the quality decision-making framework for the sustainable value creation. He takes a firm and value chain view to examine the primary purpose of the corporation and its masters. Then he presents the implication of the value-based view of the corporation for management decision-making. Guitouni uses the case of Canada's proposed Trans Mountain pipeline expansion to demonstrate how the framework he suggests may be used to characterize the decisions and actions of several actors.

In his chapter, *Responsible Research for Responsible Investment – The JUST Capital Case Study*, Ernest C. H. NG (The University of Hong Kong, China) emphasizes that both for-profit and non-profit organizations have been increasingly aware of their performance and risk, not only in financial terms, but also in social and environmental terms and aim to integrate "doing good" for social interest and "doing well" for financial success. He argues that while responsible investment could contribute to a more sustainable society, it must be built on responsible research. This paper analyses the case of JUST Capital, an independent, not-for-profit registered research organization founded to develop research, rankings, and data-driven tools. JUST Capital has been uniquely designed and driven to serve society. Not only that it was established with a diverse and strong group of board members, advisors, and partners, its polling methodology is also structured to involve different stakeholders and determined to make an impact through effecting changes in their decision-making framework.

Its success is attributed to sound research methodology and an open mindset which value plurality and multidisciplinary collaboration. Its transparency and proactive communication strategy with stakeholders also ensure broad dissemination which also further strengthens its impact.

In his chapter, *Obstacles to Sustainable Change in Business Practice*, James Wallis (Anthesis, London, UK) seeks to highlight the misalignment between academic scholarship and the true needs of businesses, society and the planet. The paper draws on the author's decades long experience consulting to managers in large businesses to describe some important obstacles to sustainable change in business. In Wallis's view these obstacles are rooted in a conceptual model of business that is poorly adapted to sustainable change. He shows the dominance this maladapted conceptual model in Business and Society, Strategy and Innovation scholarship. He suggests that an exciting and important mission of responsible scholars of business and management is to create a new paradigm which is capable of accommodating the many data and tremendous insights of the old scholarship, while reconceptualizing the territory and developing tools for sustainable change that business, society and the planet badly need.

Wallis believes that a new theory should root the firm in a societal, planetary and ethical context which includes, but is not limited to, the economic context. This broadened context implies a systemic purpose of the firm in terms liable to gain widespread understanding and assent, showing both the domains of value-creation opportunity for enterprise and placing certain constraints on its behavior. Such a theory would coherently encourage the development of mindsets and organizational forms that promote sustainability, such as clarity of organizational purpose, systems intelligence, integrated concepts of performance, and a collaborative-constructive external view. Enterprise conceived under such a model might not only accelerate the sustainable change society and the planet urgently need, but also unlock a more productive and humane economy for all.

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We, the editors of this volume strongly believe that a deep transformational change in the current business and management practices is under way. Responsible business and management researchers have a vision of being the change rather than being detached observers of this change. Some business schools have already set faculty evaluation objectives

that focus on "research that makes a difference", aiming to develop responsible leaders in all business disciplines. The hopeful message from our authors is that business school faculty can become active agents in following their vocation to catalyze the required transformation for better business and better society.

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