New Directions in Management Research and Communication: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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COVID-19 and the Role of International and Interdisciplinary Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought along with it a time for reflection amongst the leadership at BJM. We are humbled with the responsibility of the task of managing BJM, but feel it is a great opportunity to build on the excellent work of the past editors, associate editors, board members, reviewers, and authors. BJM is a very broad church journal and unique amongst its peers in terms of being open to publishing scholarship from all diverse management disciplines based in different philosophies, theories and methodologies (Budhwar and Wood, 2020). New editors and editorial team are selected to their fit with BJM’s mandate to encourage interdisciplinary and international work. There are many important features of interdisciplinary scholarship. Innovations in theory and methods that come about in different functional disciplines are communicated more effectively in an interdisciplinary setting. And combining ideas from different areas often leads to new insights that would otherwise be missed or underdeveloped on their own. A complete managerial perspective requires a broad look at all areas of management. Overall, theory development is improved in an interdisciplinary setting.

The COVID-19 crisis brings the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship to the forefront. For example, understanding the financial market implications of the pandemic requires an understanding of the human resource implications associated with social distance, and perspectives from economics, psychology, leadership, ethics, and corporate governance. Such an interdisciplinary approach is then critical to robustly address issues linked to ‘grand challenges’ of present times, with an enhanced emphasis on developing partnerships with key stakeholders (such as industry and government) to deliver impactful research (Beech and Anseel, 2020) suitable for both pandemic and post-pandemic era. For example, in the rapidly emerging ‘new-normal’, the present and future of relevant work processes and dynamics of working away from traditional work set-up and effective interactions with different stakeholders can’t be comprehensively studied adopting a single discipline lens. Certainly, a narrow siloed look at COVID-19 would lead to incomplete, inaccurate and perhaps misleading conclusions and inferences. Better scholarship with deeper theory, innovative methodology and more relevant managerial and policy implications then requires an interdisciplinary approach.

The COVID-19 crisis has further taught us about the importance of an international perspective. The pandemic has reminded us about the extreme degree to which the world is interconnected. Narrow studies from single region can have important insights, but when it is possible to take a broader view that informs a broader audience around the world then we should aim to take
that step. In order to successfully pursue such a perspective, we need to improve the quality of our methodologies and data and explain the context from which the latter were derived. Indeed, one needs to ensure the cross-cultural validity of the established instruments being used to collect data from different settings. Doing so will help inform the suitability of research instruments for different contexts and also whether or not implications from data will be applicable to diverse institutional set-ups. Here we have the opportunity to develop context-relevant measures and instruments, including new ones for established local and indigenous constructs. An example can be developing a valid scale for indigenous and cultural construct of ‘wasta’, relevant for the Middle East context. Further, the enfolding geo-political scenario demands further debates on topics such as ‘de-globalisation’ and sustainability of ‘global value chains’ (Verbeke, 2020) and a serious research agenda on the organisation of work during global crisis (Shankar, 2020). BJM is open to receive submissions around the world on such topics and should seek to do so by using the broadest possible data available.

**Conducting Research During and Post COVID-19**

The present crisis has also taught us that research cannot be rushed. Certainly, there are incentives to be the first on topic, but rushed research often leads to inaccurate findings or even mistakes.\(^1\) So, while we aim to be timely, we also aim to be ethically correct and context relevant in order to have the greatest and meaningful impact in the long run. We are obligated to ensure data quality and reliability, and perhaps most importantly, replicability. BJM papers can inform their readers about the extent to which the data presented applies in different settings.\(^2\) Research methods should use the most up to date techniques, considering development in different disciplines.\(^3\)

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates some imbalances in carrying out research at different institutions and disseminating findings, while at the same time mitigates other imbalances. On one hand, COVID-19 is magnifying disparities across institutions and researchers, particularly among institutions that are more reliant on international students and institutions that had not previously invested in technology that facilities successful online instructions. COVID-19 exacerbates research imbalances across universities in respect of those that can and cannot afford access to secondary data or pay for new data collection. We observe an increasing number of scholars using the paid services of a rapidly growing number of organisations to collect their data. Indeed, such service providers do make all sort of promises (e.g., no pressure put on the respondents to collect the data, the respondents have not been regular used to get different data over a short span of time, how much money is paid to the respondents, etc). Nevertheless, such phenomenon raises all sorts of issues (such as related to ethics, creating an imbalance between scholars who can pay or who can’t afford, etc) and this needs a serious discussion at the global learned societies, editors and publishers level and create clear norms and guidelines to ensure sustainability of responsible management research and scholarship. A related and more disturbing phenomenon is the rapid growth of thousands of ‘predatory journals’, which are publishing non peer-reviewed and poor quality research and are charging scholars to publish. This is extremely scary and damaging for the creation and sustenance of good scholarship. To deal with this rapidly growing epidemic, we need a global account for international differences in law, culture, and economics. We caution against purely cross-sectional data with limited ability to claim causal inference. Authors should strive to examine as long a time series as possible, so that we can learn from swings in the economy over time and not make inferences that are unique to one specific time period, such as the current pandemic.\(^4\)

BJM authors should be sensitive to the fact that different methods may give rise to different results, and honestly report their findings. BJM encourages “online appendices” to be published alongside a paper on the BJM webpage, where robustness checks and other information can be presented to fully inform authors. A full and proper communication best informs other academics, as well as practitioners and policymakers.

\(^{1}\)For example, for econometric concerns with post-COVID medical scholarship, see https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2015312?query=TOC&fbclid=IwAR0t7dFQc3FdAPk2qG0Lm8KXXJYfLYMWrWUobOSMWys4v7yCyT6aJtE

\(^{2}\)If the data used are limited to a specific country, then the institutional (law, cultural, and economic) conditions need to be explained to enable readers to infer the extent to which things will be different elsewhere. If the data are international in scope, then the analyses should be global instead.

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multi-actor response (e.g., Deans who approve such journals and promote researchers based on publication in them, publishers and learned societies should proactively and collectively work to disband such journals, and researchers need to be made aware about the negative implications of publishing in such rogue journals). BJM, with the strong support of British Academy of Management (BAM) and its publisher continuously tries to tackle this challenge.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has led to numerous conferences being held online, which reduces barriers to access for many scholars that would otherwise be unable to attend due to travel restrictions and costs. Scholars that adapt to online communication and learning, reach out to other scholars online instead of relying on in-person meetings at conferences, and are more proactive in disseminating their research online, will achieve more success in the future in respect of greater readership and citations. BJM regularly organises publications related workshops in different parts of the world at major conferences and at academic institutions. In the present times, we have started to deliver them online and expect a hybrid approach will become a norm in the post-pandemic era (also see Brammer and Clark, 2020).

BJM has been active in promoting video abstracts of published papers, as well as providing online teaching and learning guides to using papers in classrooms. BAM further offers avenues for collaboration through SIGs (Special Interest Groups) and virtual meetings, including the annual conference which will be ‘in the cloud’ in September 2020. We encourage scholars to make use of these tools to develop their research competencies and programmes and also to disseminate their findings.

COVID-19 Pandemic Linked Initiatives

As BJM editors we felt it important to pursue initiatives which can help researchers to develop their future research agenda and also to disseminate their COVID-19 related research. To address the former, we have invited four commentaries from diverse set of contributors on ‘The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Management and Organisation’. These include a couple of Presidents of Learned Societies (BAM and EAWOP), a senior manager of a global firm, a couple of Deans of reputed Business Schools and an established IB scholar. We hope their guidance will help you develop your future research agenda. Regarding the latter, we have created a Special Section call for BJM on the same topic. We hope it provides you with the relevant platform to disseminate your research findings.

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