COVID-19 and the Future of Management Studies. 
Insights from Leading Scholars

Daniel Muzio\textsuperscript{a} and Jonathan Doh\textsuperscript{b}
\textsuperscript{a}University of York; \textsuperscript{b}Villanova University

The COVID-19 pandemic and its medical, social and economic impacts presented profound challenges to business, government, and society. It also presents management scholars with an opportunity to rethink some of our core assumptions and directions of our research. In response, in the Summer of 2020, in our capacity as co-General Editors of the \textit{Journal of Management Studies}, one of the foremost academic journals of management and organization studies, we commissioned short commentaries from leading management scholars. In total, we published 36 of these commentaries and intend to publish several more in the coming months. Topics ranged from strategy and entrepreneurship to OB/OT, innovation and sustainability. Below, we provide our synthesis and integration of three related – overarching themes that emerged from this collection, as well as a final set of insights that we derived from this initiative.

\textbf{Continuity and Change in the Face of Disruption: New Industries, Models, and Practices}

A common theme which runs across many of our commentaries concerns the extent and direction of change in the aftermath of the pandemic. For many of our authors COVID-19 is an unforeseen exogenous shock which is reinforcing and accelerating some ongoing trends (flexible work arrangements; e-commerce; digitalization) while reversing others (traditional forms of globalization as reflected in physical movement of people may slow permanently) (Ancona et al., 2021; Foss, 2021). Whilst some firms have simply shut or scaled down their operations, the pandemic has also intensified the need for rapid response, agility and adaptation as organizations contract, pivot, re-invent themselves, and redeploy resources sometimes in a radical, sudden and potentially disruptive fashion (Ahlstrom and Wang, 2021; Hitt et al., 2021). At the global industry level, we see this in the disruption of supply chains and executive mobility patterns, at the organization level, in the rapid conversion from face to face to online business models, and the constant

\textit{Address for reprints:} Daniel Muzio, The York Management School, University of York, Freboys Lane, Heslington, York YO10 5GD, UK (daniel.muzio@york.ac.uk).

© 2021 Society for the Advancement of Management Studies and John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
introduction of new health & safety regulations policies (Kano and Oh, 2020; Verbeke and Yuan, 2021). Scholars should study these practices – that don’t fit neatly into established management theory – more closely and intensively.

Relatedly, the exogenous jolt provided by COVID-19 has created winners and losers, undermining many traditional face to face businesses while rewarding ‘asset light’, ‘virtual’ or ‘networked’ business models (George et al., 2020). This has generally cemented the dominance of a handful of global players in technology, retail, finance and other industries but in some instances it has also facilitated disruptive processes by favouring ‘challengers’ over ‘incumbents’ in a number of fields. As one example, Airbnb enjoyed an advantage on traditional hotels and tour operators as it was better positioned to service the increasing demand of families and groups who wanted to meet in remote locations and relative isolation, by providing longer term rentals and residential style self-catered accommodation. Another example are digital subscription services such as Netflix which are increasing their share of releases and viewers relative to traditional operators. Of course some of these trends were already in train but they were certainly further accelerated by the pandemic.

At the same time, COVID and its broader impacts may have removed some barriers to entry for new business start-ups. Indeed, research by John Haltiwanger at the University of Maryland suggests that the third quarter of 2020 was the highest on record for new business registrations in the USA, with nearly 1.6 million new business applications (Sasso and Matthews, 2021). Further bankruptcies in the USA declined substantially in 2020 as compared to 2019, partly because of the income support payments provided by government. As such, both markets and governments were, in their own ways, able to mitigate or buffer some of the more severe effects of the COVID-19-induced recession.

Control and Coordination at Work

One further debate that emerges from our commentaries pertains to the control and coordination of work tasks and activities. Once scenario, which is inspired by work on organizational routines (Pentland and Reuter, 1994) and technological interdependencies (Thompson, 1967), suggests that, since existing procedures, routines and systems cannot be easily stretched to cover virtual and home based working this will become increasingly reliant on output based forms of control, whereby delivering on objectives will matter more than displaying the right forms of behaviour. This will be supported by asynchronous and de-centralized coordination processes which allow for the modularization and distributed coordination of tasks through technologies and processes (Foss, 2021; George et al., 2020). These include the increasing use of open access platforms and file repositories such as those originally pioneered by Linux, which allow for the direct observability and independent contribution to work activities. This scenario might also be characterized by more fluid and diffuse forms of collaboration and more permeable boundaries between tasks and organizations. Of course none of this is entirely new as these tendencies existed pre-Covid-19 but the pandemic is again accelerating and amplifying these trends.

An alternative scenario highlighted by some of our commentators sees organizations retreating onto themselves, by internalizing activities and reducing interdependencies
whilst some may also further centralize decision making in the hands of restricted core of key managers (Foss, 2021). In this context organizational cultures may also be expected to become more autarchic and perhaps authoritarian (Spicer, 2020). Finally, in a more dystopian scenario, the new technologies developed and established during the lockdown may further accelerate a ‘control revolution’ (Beniger, 1986) within workplaces which could finally result in a digital version of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, as long anticipated by many scholars working in a labour process or critical management studies tradition (Mckinlay and Starkey, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). Here, employees just like the inmates in Bentham’s prison, are aware of the fact that at any point they may be under managerial observation without them necessarily knowing so. An exemplar of this is the notion of the ‘digital exhaust’ (Leonardi, 2021), whereby new technologies will allow organization to routinely and effortlessly capture increasingly fine grained information on its work processes and workforce, by automatically using the meta-data produced by various technologies to create logs of employee behaviour. This in turn allows companies to create digital footprints for a particular employee or team which can be used to evaluate their current behaviours and even predict their future ones whilst also allowing organizations to render professional and white collar work observable, measurable and increasingly amenable to scientific management style types of intervention.

Uneven Consequences

It is well established that COVID-19, the lockdowns and ensuing economic crisis has had uneven consequences, penalizing in particular women, ethnic minorities and low wage earners in general. This is of course not because COVID-19 is racist or classist. Rather it reflects how the pandemic further exposed existing fault lines and inequalities within society. A lot of this, of course, depends on the effects of ‘inequality regimes’ which govern how jobs and occupations are accessed, designed and rewarded and on how organizations are managed (Acker, 2006; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019). In particular, low wage workers, which are disproportionately female and from ethnic minorities, are less likely to work from home and more likely to live in more cramped conditions. They rely on public transport and are more dependent on increasingly crowded and underfunded public services. They are also more likely to work for employers with a ‘low skill/low wage’ business model which prioritize cost effectiveness over wellbeing. Similarly, the pandemic and ensuing school closures laid bare the persistent gender imbalance in childcare, even where women have become integrated in high status, high paying and formerly male-dominated domains (Milliken et al., 2020). Yet, the pandemic by bringing the scars of existing inequalities into stark relief, may also help to pierce ‘the veil of ignorance’ (Munir, 2021) and bring about transformational change in this area, by questioning how and in whose interest are our organizations and societies run (Amis and Greenwood, 2021).

For instance, we may become increasingly sensitive to organizations which have prioritized retaining their bonuses or dividends over avoiding redundancies, as in the case of companies such as JC Penney and Hertz which awarded multi-million dollar bonuses to their CEOs just days before filing for bankruptcy (Munir, 2021). We may become more sceptical of celebrity CEOs and their turnaround stories and more attuned to noticing
the everyday work of the front line workers who have kept these firms going. We may become more aware of differences between organizations in terms of their healthcare benefits, wellbeing policies and willingness to give their employees a voice in decision making processes. This may also prompt a process of occupational re-rating as we confer more value and regard to those key workers, such as doctors and nurses but also teachers and transport, care and delivery workers who have been in the front line in the fight against COVID-19 (Ashforth, 2020; Zannoni, 2021). Finally, at a more societal level, the pandemic and its management might make us more aware of institutional differences between countries and how countries with stronger cooperative and collectivist orientations may have outperformed more individualist ones in reducing both its healthcare and economic costs (Avery, 2020; Eaton and Hecksher, 2021).

Concluding Thoughts

We want to conclude to offer some of our thoughts which build and go beyond the rich commentaries included in our series. First, COVID-19 has underscored the reality of non-ergodic change, or of what some might call ‘Knightian’ uncertainty, whereby periods of relative stability are punctuated with radical, transformational change or even periods of constant, unpredictable, and therefore, difficult-to-prepare for change (Ahlstrom and Wang, 2021; Hitt et al., 2021). This reality has manifested at the national level as countries have scrambled to respond to multiple waves of the outbreak and various secondary and tertiary effects; at the industry level as companies in travel, hospitality, commercial real estate and others have been upended; at the firm-level as companies have been forced to operate in constant crisis mode; and at the individual level as individuals have had to learn new ways of working, adapt to changing work shifts and hazards, and redefine work and family boundaries. Relatedly, COVID-19 is simultaneously generating both centripetal and centrifugal effects: by exposing and reinforcing interdependencies among countries, sectors (business, government, civil society), groups, and individuals while also exacerbating divisions and differences in the form of economic and medical nationalism at the global and national level, pressures to source regionally or locally, rising inequalities and other forms of separation. Scholars must recognize that these forces can co-exist in a dynamic and interactive fashion.

Second, COVID-19 intersects with the growing debate around the future of work by, as discussed above, accelerating existing trends whilst halting or perhaps even reversing others. Indeed, a lot of writing on COVID-19 is inevitably future projected and concerned with the balance between change and continuity, with some predicting a return to normality whilst others emphasizing the dawn of a ‘new normal’. Specifically, COVID-19 is increasing our reliance on technology as epitomized by the rapid growth of video-conferencing and other digital technologies and platforms, and as such fueling trends towards digitalization and virtualization which are a staple of the Fourth Industrial revolution (Schwab, 2017). COVID-19 is also creating the space and opportunity to trial and develop new artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions such as the growing use of increasingly sophisticated Bots in call centres as a way to handle growing consumer demand in the context of disrupted routines and reduced workforces. Yet, this is also exposing the unfairness and ineffectiveness of some of these technologies,
as indicated by the controversial and ultimately unsuccessful attempts by the British government to use algorithms to award school qualifications following the cancellation of traditional exams. As such COVID-19 is also creating the critical space where the limits and dangers of AI are exposed and discussed. Relatedly, as well as digitalizing many activities COVID-19 has also brought to the foreground the importance of those often poorly paid critical jobs (careers, counsellors, health workers) which rely on a human touch and cannot be easily automated. As such COVID-19 is certainly acting as key event in shaping the future of work by accelerating some of its trends but at the same time also highlighting some of their limitations.

Finally, COVID-19 has suddenly and dramatically halted what seemed to be the inexorable rise of the ‘market logic’ and almost overnight displaced this with the values, discourses, and practices connected with alternative logics such as those of the ‘state’ and the ‘community’ (Thornton et al., 2012). In particular, the State has reasserted its central role across all economic and societal sectors, by imposing unprecedented levels of regulations and shutting down whole sectors (hospitality) whilst seeking to rapidly expand others through state intervention, increased funding and deregulation (medical research, healthcare, online education) (King and Carberry, 2020; Lawton et al., 2020). Furthermore, through the various subsidy and furlough schemes, the ‘frontiers of the state’, to reverse Margaret Thatcher’s famous expression, have been rolled forward to the point, that even in market oriented countries such as the UK, half of the workforce now directly depends on state employment or subsidy (Telegraph, 2020). Whilst across the media and public discourse the priorities of economic growth, solidarity and freedom of enterprise are subordinated to those of safety, collective wellbeing and community cohesion.

In this regard, COVID-19 has drawn further attention to – and has brought into clear focus – the need for management scholars to address bigger, bolder, and broader questions. Indeed, management scholars have been challenging the management research community to tackle what are increasingly termed ‘grand challenges’, those complex, multi-level, multi-actor issues such as climate change, inequality, implications of mass migrations, and health crises (Bansal et al., 2021; Buckley et al., 2017; Crane and Matten, 2021; Howard-Grenville, 2021; Munir, 2021). Many of these challenges have been exacerbated and aggravated by COVID-19; for example, according to the United Nations, and additional 207 million people globally could be pushed into extreme poverty due to the Pandemic (UN, 2020). These realities underscore the necessity that management scholars think beyond traditional conceptualizations and consider more integrative and holistic topics and approaches in order to ensure that management research is fully engaged with the pressing global issues that COVID-19 has helped to illuminate. With our collection of COVID-19 commentaries, the Journal of Management Studies sought to encourage this process. We hope that over the year to come we will publish many articles addressing the questions and issues raised by this collection.

REFERENCES

Acker, J. (2006). ‘Inequality regimes gender, class, and race in organizations’. Gender & Society, 20, 441–64.
Ahlstrom, D. and Wang, L. C. (2021). ‘Temporal strategies and firms’ speedy responses to COVID-19’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12664
Amis, M. J. and Greenwood, R. (2021). ‘Organisational change in a (post-) pandemic world: Rediscovering interests and values’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12663

Ancona, D., Bresman, H. and Mortensen, M. (2021). ‘Shifting team research after COVID-19: Evolutionary and Revolutionary Change’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12651

Ashforth, B. E. (2020). ‘Identity and identification during and after the pandemic: How might COVID-19 change the research questions we ask?’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1763–66.

Avery, D. R. (2020). ‘Lessons from the Losing: Implications of the covid-19 pandemic for organizational diversity scholarship and practice’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1746–49.

Bansal, P., Grewatsch, S. and Sharma, G. (2021). ‘How COVID-19 informs business sustainability research: It’s time for a systems perspective’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12669

Beniger, J. R. (1986). The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buckley, P. O., Doh, J. P. and Benischke, M. (2017). ‘Towards a renaissance in international business research? Big questions, grand challenges, and the future of IB Scholarship’. Journal of International Business Studies, 48, 1043–64.

Crane, A. and Matten, D. (2021). ‘COVID-19 and the future of CSR research’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12642

Eaton, A. and Heckscher, C. (2021). ‘COVID’s Impacts on the field of labour and employment relations’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12645

Foss, N. J. (2021). ‘The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on firms’ organizational designs’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12643

George, G., Lakhani, K. R. and Puranam, P. (2020). ‘What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1754–58

Hitt, M. A., Arregle, J.-L. and Holmes, R. M. Jr (2021). ‘Strategic Management Theory in a Post-Pandemic and Non-Ergodic World’. Journal of Management Studies, 58, 259–264. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12646.

Howard-Grenville, J. (2021). ‘Grand challenges, covid-19 and the future of organizational scholarship’. Journal of Management Studies - forthcoming.

Kano, L. and Oh, C. H. (2020). ‘Global value chains in the post-covid world: Governance for reliability’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1773–77

King, B. G. and Carberry, E. J. (2020). ‘Movements, societal crisis, and organizational theory’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1741–45.

Lawton, T. C., Dorobantu, S., Rajwani, T. S. and Sun, P. (2020). ‘The implications of COVID-19 for non-market strategy research’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1732–36.

Leonardi, P. M. (2021). ‘COVID-19 and the new technologies of organizing: Digital exhaust, digital footprints, and artificial intelligence in the wake of remote work’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12648

McKinlay, A. and Starkey, K. (1998). Foucault, Management and Organization Theory: From Panopticon to Technologies of Self. London: Sage.

Milliken, F. J., Kneeland, M. K. and Flynn, E. (2020). ‘Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for gender equity issues at work’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1767–72.

Munir, K. A. (2021). ‘Inequality in the time of Corona Virus’. Journal of Management Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12674

Pentland, B. T. and Reuter, H. H. (1994). ‘Organizational routines as grammars of action’. Administrative Science Quarterly, 39, 464–510.

Sasso, M. and Matthews, S. (2021). ‘U.S. business starts enjoyed their best year ever amid Covid-19’. Bloomberg. Available at https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-13/u-s-business-starts-enjoyed-their-best-year-ever-amid-covid-19 (accessed 18 January 2021).

Schwab, K. (2017). The Fourth Industrial Revolution. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

Sewell, G. and Wilkinson, B. (1992). ‘Someone to watch over me surveillance, discipline and the just-in-time labour process’. Sociology, 26, 271–81.

Spicer, A. (2020). ‘Organizational culture and COVID-19’. Journal of Management Studies, 57, 1737–40.

Telegraph (2020). More Than Half of All Adults Now Paid by the State. Available at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2020/05/04/half-adults-now-paid-state/ (accessed 19 January 2020).

Thompson, J. D. (1967). Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

© 2021 Society for the Advancement of Management Studies and John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W. and Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The Institutional Logics Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tomaskovic-Devey, D. and Avent-Holt, D. (2019). *Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

United Nations (2020). *Revealed: The Cost of the Pandemic on World’s Poorest Countries*. Available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1079162 (accessed 12 January 2021).

Verbeke, A. and Yuan, W. (2021). ‘A few implications of the covid-19 pandemic for international business strategy research’. *Journal of Management Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12665

Zanoni, P. (2021). ‘Whither critical management and organization studies? For a performative critique of capitalist flows in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic’. *Journal of Management Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12655