
An overview of research methods in international management: an introduction

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1 Introduction

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to complement traditional methods. New research methods in management may emerge to address a specific problem or as a response to research conducted by other scholars. The emergence of new tools, techniques and software, coupled with changes in the environment that require new information sources, can create opportunities to develop and employ new methods.

Many researchers believe that good theory followed by bad methods hinders their ability to generalise findings to other temporal and geographical contexts (Lewin, 1945; Tsoukas, 1989). For example, real-world relationships are often asymmetrical, and although multiple regression analysis is effective at identifying symmetric relationships, it sometimes fails to capture asymmetric relationships. Qualitative comparative analysis can help to overcome this problem (Fiss, 2011; Mendel and Korjani, 2013). Each management method acts as a lens that allows scholars to interpret one or more forms of management and seek a variety of solutions to new or existing problems. Hence, a critical review of these methods and careful analysis of the resulting conclusions is crucial. Management in different economies, sectors and businesses depends on the results arising from different methods.

Scientific research uses a range of quantitative and/or qualitative methods to provide different solutions to problems. In management research, the choice of language is important to enable communication amongst scholars during both data collection and the dissemination of findings. Contrasting different studies (or even the same study) using different methods reduces the gap between theory and practice because it leads to the generalisation of findings and means that the theory can become more widely used.

This special issue contains management research papers that present new solutions using quantitative approaches, qualitative analysis as an alternative to traditional quantitative methods, and applications of new methods.

2 Contributions

In the empirical study 'Cross-cultural diversity management in service firms', Bouncken, Reuschl, Barwinski and Viala develop and apply an integrative research framework to

investigate the effects of diversity on hospital performance. They adjust the service–profit chain for hospitals to provide a framework that explains the impact of diversity on hospital productivity. The adjusted service–profit chain provides a measure for diversity, internal service quality, employee job satisfaction, patient satisfaction and hospital productivity to address three challenges. First, the worldwide demographic change and the ageing Western population are increasing the demand for healthcare services. Second, the growing medical demand of this ageing population is exacerbated by the declining number of healthcare professionals. Hospitals increase their workforce diversity and face new challenges as they attempt to counter this shortage through an international recruiting strategy. Third, growing healthcare expenditure, a growing demand for healthcare services and decreasing availability of healthcare professionals force hospitals to improve productivity. The authors focus on the service–profit chain for hospitals and analyse the effects of workforce diversity on employee job satisfaction as well as overall hospital productivity. The authors adjust the general service–profit chain framework to the specific characteristics of hospitals (i.e. the provision of healthcare to patients and the absence of returning customers due to loyalty) and assume a negative effect of diversity on the internal service quality with diversity management as a moderator to balance this negative effect. The hypothesised effects are tested using a large-scale dataset of primary survey data from 529 physicians and nurses working in 30 German hospitals and secondary data from German health insurance companies. The study shows a negative mediating effect of diversity on employee job satisfaction. This effect further translates into reduced productivity as the adjusted service–profit chain model is followed. Current literature on diversity suggests that by introducing diversity management, the negative effects of diversity can be eliminated and the positive effects can be enhanced. The authors show that current forms of diversity management in hospitals are unable to counter the negative effect of diversity. They give reasons for this important finding and provide managerial implications for improving the status quo in hospitals. The authors stress that the positive effects of diversity reported in other empirical studies may also be achieved by hospitals. However, hospitals must prioritise diversity management, develop adequate training plans and ensure the participation of employees to enable employees to benefit from diversity. The gains for hospitals are promising: increased internal service quality, higher employee and patient satisfaction and improved productivity.

‘New strategies to measure and strengthen the social role of business incubators: their application to a Spanish region’ develops a method to assess the social as well as economic profitability of business incubators. To do so, Sentana, Gonzalez, Gasco and Llopis analyse several general methods to measure profitability. These include the EU Cost-Benefit Analysis Guide, social cost-benefit analysis and the social return on investments. The EU Cost-Benefit Analysis Guide assesses expenses and incomes. Social cost-benefit analysis offers a consistent approach to understanding project selection. The social return on investments identifies the need to contrast information between the two stakeholders: the entities that promote incubators and their users. This study uses a holistic perspective. It makes little sense to assess incubators as a purely economic pursuit when, in fact, their extra-monetary (social and regional) repercussions are often their *raison d’être*. Public sector activities are rarely justified by the direct economic return that they bring the treasury; the social benefits of such activities matter most. Emphasis should also be placed on an overall assessment of the performance of incubators. This assessment is based on calculating the expenses or economic resources that are available to entities to keep them operational, the contributions of entrepreneurs

regarding their inclusion in the incubator, public subsidies and some indirect revenues (in this case, tax revenues) that affect all public administrations directly and incubators by extension. Based on this economic profitability evaluation model, the performance of each incubator can be measured by calculating the difference between expenses and revenues. The goal is to develop an aggregate final assessment of social performance, considering the expenses or costs needed for the incubator to operate and the revenues that are directly and indirectly generated from taxes through direct activities (the functioning of the incubator) and indirect activities (the impact of the firms associated with the incubator). Two types of data were gathered for this study: qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey addressed to business project leaders and directors or managers of incubated firms). A number of recommendations to enhance the value of business incubators can be drawn from the results of this study. First, the entities that finance and support the creation of incubators can be compensated using tax income. Second, incubators should be promoted as drivers of innovation in today's economic models. Third, the role of incubators should be re-evaluated to enable them to track incubated firms, accelerating their rotation. Finally, the demand for the facilities that incubators offer should be adapted to ensure their profitability.

In 'The influence of leadership styles on the internationalisation of 'born-global' firms and traditionally global-expanding firms', Kraus, Niemand, Besler, Stieg and Martinez-Climent shed light on the reciprocity of different leadership characteristics in the internationalisation process. The continuous globalisation of economies around the world, coupled with intensifying global competition, steadily increases the number of firms that must internationalise to capture new markets. This growing pressure on firms essentially forces them to internationalise. Internationally active firms therefore need individuals who can lead them through this international context. Leadership and internationalisation are established areas of scientific research, yet the interplay between these areas has been under-examined by scholars. This study thus explores the intersection of leadership and internationalisation through large-scale empirical investigation of 437 internationally active firms from the four German-speaking countries: Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Liechtenstein. In traditional international business research, the internationalisation of a firm is mostly described as a stepwise progression consisting of the growing commitment of resources to international expansion activities based on building knowledge whilst becoming involved in business activities across borders. Involvement in international business activities mostly occurs after a long period of purely domestic activity. However, recent research has identified a group of firms that skip this phase, moving straight to international activities from their inception. For these born global firms, internationalisation is a pillar of their business model. However, irrespective of whether the firm is a traditional internationally expanding firm or a born global firm, its human capital – especially that of its leader(s) – substantially influences its performance and strategy. The authors address five propositions using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) of their empirical results. The goal is to identify leadership structures that allow for high degrees of internationalisation of traditional internationalising firms or born global firms and to identify the differences between the two groups of firms. The results of the fsQCA show that under distinct sets of conditions, multiple paths can lead to a high degree of internationalisation for both traditional internationalising firms and born global firms. The results also show that several conditions distinguish a traditional internationalising firm from a born global firm. Specifically, under distinct conditions, transactional as well

as transformational leadership can lead to a high level of internationalisation for both traditional internationalising firms and born global firms.

The empirical study 'Exploring the asymmetric influence of socioemotional wealth priorities on entrepreneurial behaviour in family businesses' advances the socioemotional wealth perspective of family firms, one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in this field in recent years. Llanos-Contreras and Alonso-Dos-Santos assess multiple dimensions that form the socioemotional wealth construct and propose a methodological response to the fact that these priorities are sometimes in conflict. Specifically, the authors assess how family firms' priority to preserve the family dynasty in the business (family succession), corporate reputation, social ties, family identity and emotional attachment to the business can influence the entrepreneurial behaviour of small and medium-sized family enterprises in Chile. This issue is important because socioemotional wealth has typically been indirectly assessed using family control of business ownership and management, even though it is acknowledged that the essence of family businesses is the pursuit of non-economic goals. Likewise, there is also agreement that family business owners' non-economic wealth can be driven by several factors. The mixed methods design applied in this study was implemented in three stages: case study, partial least squares (PLS) and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). The first stage was used to determine socioemotional wealth priorities in family businesses and identify the items that form the scales under study. PLS was then used to validate the scales and determine the direct influence of each socioemotional wealth priority on entrepreneurial behaviour. Finally, fsQCA was employed to develop models that explain entrepreneurial behaviour in terms of the presence and absence of variables. These models, in which some variables are absent whilst others are present, are explained by previous propositions that posit the trade-off between the factors that form this construct. The fsQCA models also align with the idea that family businesses can develop several balances to drive socioemotional wealth. In summary, this paper contributes to our understanding of the socioemotional wealth perspective of family firms by exploring how socioemotional wealth influences entrepreneurial orientation. A further contribution of this study is the use of non-linear methods to determine antecedents of entrepreneurial behaviour in these firms. This article provides an integrated methodological proposal for the assessment of the influence of socioemotional wealth on family businesses behaviour. By incorporating the multidimensionality of this construct, conflicting priorities and multiple models (multiple balances/combinations of priorities) driving this wealth, this article advances the specification of the socioemotional wealth model.

In 'Estimating the determinants of executive selection in multinational companies: a two-sided matching model', Rickley investigates executive selection in the international labour market. The author acknowledges that human capital exerts a significant impact on firm performance. Therefore, the way that firms select their workers is important. Not only do human capital attributes differ between individuals, but also the value of human capital differs between firms. Therefore, the value of the worker depends not only on his or her abilities and attributes but also on the quality of the match between the firm and the worker's human capital attributes. This reflection raises further questions in areas such as the determinants of a job match, the mechanisms that underlie the matching process and the way that an efficient job match arises. This study investigates executive selection in the international labour market. To do so, the study examines the international labour market and executive appointment processes in multinational corporations' (MNCs) subsidiaries using a unique dataset on subsidiary executive

appointments in multinational banks. The sample consists of 75 subsidiaries of 34 US and European Banks located in 13 Central and Eastern European countries between 2005 and 2010. A competitive assignment matching model was used to conduct the analysis. Firm-specific human capital and general human capital were examined together to enhance the current understanding of firm hiring behaviour and determine the relative value that firms place on particular types of human capital under different economic circumstances. The article estimates the drivers of efficient job matching by modelling how executives with different skillsets partner with MNC subsidiaries and examines how the joint preferences of executives and firms change depending on economic conditions. The study addresses the limitation of the exclusion of unobservable variables, such as the availability of human capital in the labour market, reported in prior studies. The international research context is characterised by heterogeneous firms with varied human capital needs. The principal findings of the research indicate that appointment strategies differ between the two types of functional roles of monitoring and implementing. However, for both types of functional role, greater consideration is given to national experience than to regional and international experience or educational attainment. Amongst the monitoring roles (CEO, Deputy CEO, CFOs, etc.), an executive job match is driven by complementarities between MNC size and executive education, the scope of international operations and executive international experience, and the subsidiary acquisition status and executive tenure with the MNC. Firm-specific knowledge in the form of executive tenure is more important during periods of economic growth than economic downturn, whilst general human capital in the form of education is more important during economic downturn than during an upswing. Amongst the implementation roles (COOs, legal executives, sales executives, etc.), the selection process is driven by a different set of selection mechanisms: subsidiary age and executive national experience and subsidiary acquisition status and executive tenure with the MNC. The examination of the difference between the two roles and their subsequent appointment strategies contributes to our understanding of the determinants of executive-firm marketing and provides insight into the relationship between human capital and company resources.

In 'Multinational enterprise subsidiaries in local clusters: embeddedness or isolation?', Tomás-Miquel, Expósito-Langa, Belso-Martínez and Mas-Verdú address several research questions regarding the way that multinational enterprises (MNEs) co-locate subsidiaries in search of new resources. Clusters represent a source of local knowledge in a specific sector, and their geographical location implies the existence of skilled suppliers, support institutions and other companies linked to a particular industry. The combination of advantages of local industry knowledge and the global nature of MNEs entices some firms to co-locate their subsidiaries in these contexts. Accordingly, clusters are particularly attractive and become a focus of attention for external MNEs that have sufficient resources to establish new subsidiaries in these clusters. Once an MNE subsidiary is established in a cluster, it is important to know how the subsidiary is integrated into the cluster's network and to understand the relational portfolio that the subsidiary develops to capitalise on local resources. This research was carried out in the Valencian Toy Valley Cluster in Spain, which has traditionally stood out for its entrepreneurship and resilience to changes in the global environment. This cluster has become a focal point for MNEs, which have gradually introduced subsidiaries in this cluster. Nowadays, several MNE subsidiaries are well integrated in this cluster. Therefore, this cluster offers a suitable setting to address the following research questions: Do structural characteristics of MNE subsidiaries differ from those of other

firms in the cluster? How are MNE subsidiaries in the cluster related and what kind of links do they establish? What is the profile of the firms with which MNE subsidiaries establish links? Drawing on different methodological approaches, this empirical research provides interesting data. For instance, the study shows the selectivity of local members, which, as a club of skilled partners, primarily consists of highly specialised suppliers with whom business relationships are established and local institutions that support business and research activities. These findings are consistent with expectations. They provide interesting conclusions not only for companies but also for the implementation of industrial policies that encourage regional development.

In 'The comparative method and comparative management: uneasy bedfellows or natural partners?' Kornelakis sheds light on the relationship between the comparative method and comparative management research. Management research is usually concerned with organisation-level practices and strategies, whereas the comparative method originally takes countries or societies as the main units of analysis. Therefore, the two are perceived as uneasy bedfellows that would not normally be associated with each other. However, this trend has been reversing in recent years. Comparative methods have been used extensively in the context of business and management studies. This article considers the relationship between the comparative method and comparative management research by first considering the infamous quantitative/qualitative divide and the methodological debate over variable-orientated analyses versus case-orientated approaches. The comparative method is then presented as a third way or a compromise between these two approaches. The article later examines the importance of the comparative method and its relevance in management research and concludes with a summary of the primary arguments, the article's limitations and a proposal for future research on the subject. Ultimately, the author advocates use of the comparative method as a natural partner of comparative management approaches that require contextualisation of conditions that lead to different outcomes. The author also proves its potential to overcome specific weaknesses of single-case qualitative methods and quantitative methods. The article highlights two developments. First, the article presents new opportunities for the analysis of medium-N samples through methodological innovations in qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). Second, the article discusses how the stream of comparative capitalisms and business systems can provide significant support in comparing across countries, whilst using industries or organisations as the unit of analysis. The author argues that these developments suggest that the comparative method is a natural partner of comparative management. Furthermore, this relevance and deeper engagement with the comparative methodology will lead to the enrichment of methodological pluralism in international management research. The author outlines some of the advantages of comparative analysis. For example, its logic of causal inference resembles a quasi-experimental design and considers precious counterfactuals, which are sometimes implicit in single-case research designs. Additionally, the comparative method can highlight processes and mechanisms that quantitative approaches neglect and can help capture relationships of asymmetry, overcoming problems in multiple regression analysis regarding asymmetrical relationships. Furthermore, this method is able to contextualise the heterogeneity of cultural and institutional contexts across comparative capitalisms and national business systems. Overall, the author suggests that further and deeper engagement with the comparative method is a development that will enrich methodological pluralism in the field of international management.

In 'Strategic decision-making in family firms: an explorative study', Kallmuenzer, Hora and Peters develop a deeper understanding of strategic decision-making (SDM) processes in family firms in times of increased complexity of decisions in global markets. The study considers the influence of the entrepreneurial family and further stakeholders in these strategic processes. Recent family business research has shown that socioemotional wealth (SEW) goals affect the strategic orientation of family firms. These goals are characterised by the strong emotional attachment of family members to the family firm and the ambition to preserve the firm for future generations. Another goal of SEW is to develop social ties with close internal and external stakeholders, which in return might also influence strategic processes of the family firm. Internal stakeholders include employees of the firm, particularly those with managerial functions (non-family managers). The external environment and perceived environmental uncertainty can also be expected to affect SDM in family firms. The present study thus aims to provide novel insights into how this SEW thinking and the participation of stakeholders shape SDM in family firms. Researchers interviewed 30 family managers in 15 family firms in the service industry, which is composed primarily of family firms and is characterised by high-contact services to customers and intense competition. Results of a qualitative analysis using NVivo data analysis software show that family membership, adherence to SEW goals, and expertise and work experience are crucial factors for participation in SDM processes, which are often collectively developed by family and non-family managers. In addition, SDM processes are determined by long-term goals of the family firm and the need for inter-firm collaboration to overcome hostile environmental dynamics and benefit from external knowledge and shared financial efforts to survive. In this situation, family firms may again rely on the strength of their social ties and thus their SEW thinking. Practical implications of this study offer recommendations to help policymakers further relax government restrictions for entrepreneurs, improve manager and employee education and training, and support cooperation between small (family) firms, which has been shown to foster SDM.

Lastly, in 'Developing management skills through experiential learning: the effectiveness of outdoor training and mindfulness', del Val Nuñez, Romero, Sánchez and Aránega define observable behaviours related to the development of the dimensions of emotional intelligence. The authors also present outdoor training as an evaluation tool. Through different exercises and dynamics, the subject lives the experience and sets in motion the behaviours defined in the dictionary of competencies. The subject also becomes aware of the feedback that people receive after carrying out behaviours that lead to success or, alternatively, after failing to contribute or even harming the work of the group or the leader. Finally, the practice of mindfulness is presented as an additional tool. The study participants form two categories: the first consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and the second consists of workers. Through different tests, organised under the learning experience tool, emphasis is placed on the evaluation of specific behaviours that reflect a level of a given competence to provide feedback to the individual on strengths and areas for improvement without criticising the individual's efforts. The following competencies are evaluated: teamwork, communication, leadership, motivation, tolerance to stress, organisation and planning, responsibility and analysis, and resolution and anticipation of problems. The authors conclude that teamwork should be encouraged to ensure the leader knows how to direct, delegate and accept opinions, ideas and criticisms from other members.

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