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Management Research: European Perspectives

This book offers useful reflections on the distinctiveness of European management research and its contribution to the study of management. It contains fourteen essays previously published in the *European Management Journal* and subsequently revised and updated for the present volume. The book is a welcome intervention, given ongoing debates on the evolution of management research and, in particular, concerns about the rising significance of journal rankings, their bias towards US journals and their potentially deleterious effects on European scholarship. The volume includes contributions from the fields of marketing, organization theory, strategy, and corporate social responsibility, among other areas. The cognate field of international business (IB) is not represented but the book nevertheless offers some relevant insights to which I return later.

The editor, Sabina Siebert, provides an informative introduction to the volume in which she also tackles the question of whether there is a distinctive approach to management research in Europe. And that inevitably leads to the need for an ‘Other’ against which European research identity can be affirmed – in the present context, North American scholarship. After rightly pointing out that one should, of course, be careful about simple dichotomies, stereotypes and caricature, Siebert proceeds with a brief discussion of what is widely perceived to make the two traditions different. Based on a synthesis of the volume’s various contributions, she then puts forward three characteristics that, arguably, characterise the European approach: *transdisciplinarity*; *continental European philosophy*; and cognizance of the role of *context* in management theory and practice. The North American model is basically seen to have less of these. Differences aside, Siebert also points to the increasing “cross-fertilization of the two communities” highlighting that “the boundaries between once very different approaches are blurring”.

In “Reflections on the Distinctiveness of European Management Scholarship”, Robert Chia offers an ebullient defence of the European approach. He notes that “the increasing pressure to publish in ‘high impact’ American based journals is now beginning to overshadow traditional [European] research concerns”. In particular, echoing the critiques of Gerard George and Sumantra Ghoshal, Chia warns against the ongoing obsession with ‘scientific’ rigour in management research and instead argues for ‘artistic’ rigour. This is one that prioritizes openness towards intellectual pluralism, that places emphasis on context and inductive inquiry and that is more concerned with “imaginative” than “scientific” generalization. Chia goes on to argue European scholarship, given its rich and diverse cultural and intellectual heritage, is well placed to lead the way in this kind of research. According to him, it has “immense potential” and should play an active role in encouraging research “that is not simply scientifically rigorous, but imaginatively interesting and often counterintuitive”.

Tor Hernes, in “In Search of a Soul of Relevance for European Management Research”, follows Chia’s line of reasoning, highlighting the importance of engaging with the fluid and processual nature of managerial work. He proposes that four areas constitute or should define the “soul” of European research: practice, time, becoming, and heterogeneity. Again, standing against the widespread preoccupation with scientific rigour and generalisability across time and space, Hernes argues for “a

localized, embedded and temporally informed understanding of managerial work”. Context is inevitably seen to be particularly important here, which in turn calls for a “richness of description and explanation” in research practice. Like Chia, Hernes considers European research to be well placed to engage and lead in the development of such research.

The issues of pluralism and contextualism run through much of the rest of the book. Catherine Cassell, in “European Qualitative Research: A Celebration of Diversity and a Cautionary Tale”, usefully brings a methodological angle to the discussion, reminding us that “the transatlantic gap is also about methodological approaches”. According to her, European research is more open to a diversity of research methods and places greater value on qualitative research than its North American counterpart where the emphasis is more on “quantitative analysis across large samples to test hypotheses.” Cassell also points to the diversity existing within European qualitative research and the various onto-epistemological traditions underpinning it and encourages such pluralism as a means towards greater understanding of managerial phenomena. Importantly, Cassell cautions against ongoing efforts to standardize qualitative research and the criteria used to evaluate and judge such research along North-American lines. She argues these efforts may lead to producing “formulaic pieces of research”, thereby potentially endangering European research diversity and the benefits seen to flow from it. Cassell encourages researchers to resist homogenization but emphasises that the onus should also be on “epistemological gatekeepers [...] such as editors and reviewers to facilitate methodological pluralism.”

The observation of homogenization and associated convergence onto the North-American model is somewhat tempered by some essays. Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, in “Art, Philosophy and Business: Turns to Speculative Realism in European Management Scholarship”, offers an elegant, philosophically-oriented essay in which he argues the “new world” research tradition is losing its grip on our imagination. Instead, “[i]nternational awareness of old world intellectual traditions is [...] growing in legitimacy, making European management research actually climb the ladders of academic evaluations, contrary to what is claimed by Tammar B. Zilber (2015).” In “Turning a Disadvantage into a Resource: Working at the Periphery”, Tammar B. Zilber indeed tends rather problematically to reproduce and promote the widespread view of US scholarship as a universal norm towards which ‘Others’ have converged or are in the process of converging. For de Mouthoux, the wave is in fact turning, evidenced in, for instance, the ‘aesthetic’ and ‘linguistic’ turns in European management research.

The essay by Mike Saks and David Brock, “Professions and Organizations: A European Perspective”, also points in this direction. The authors highlight the US origin of much research on the professions and professional service firms but also note the growth of European scholarship and the gradual shift of the field towards a “more Euro-centered focus” in the last few decades. For them, the “US’s formerly unrivalled supremacy is diminishing – albeit slowly”. The authors argue “the contribution of European scholars to the field of professional organization is not only substantial, but also distinctive”. They highlight how Europeans have contributed “a refreshing focus on newly developing professions while deepening insights into the more established professions—centrally including those in healthcare.”

The strengthening of the European tradition or contribution is also stressed in Andreas Kaplan's "European Management and European Business Schools: Insights from the History of Business Schools". Here, the author offers a useful reflection on the question of European distinctiveness by focusing on management education. He identifies significant differences between Europe and the USA in terms, firstly, of the content of the education offered and, secondly, of teaching methods, whilst also noting the diversity that exists within Europe itself. In his view, intra-European diversity makes European business schools more open to cultural difference, more interdisciplinary and more philosophically and ethically grounded than their US counterparts. For Kaplan, homogenization is unlikely to happen given the diversity of languages spoken in Europe and the tendency of Europeans to view diversity as an advantage, not a problem to be overcome. This may be the case but pressures for standardization and, in particular, efforts to normalise the use of English in research and teaching in continental European institutions cannot be underestimated (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017).

The other seven, well-written chapters in the volume explore a range of issues, from extensions of institutional theory (Roy Suddaby, Alison Minkus and Max Ganzin) and explorations of the role of Bruno Latour and Niklas Luhmann as organization theorists (Barbara Czarniawska) to discussions of the role of paradox and poetry in strategic management (Donald MacLean and Robert MacIntosh), of organization in organization studies (Göran Ahrne, Nils Brunsson and David Seidl), of businesses as promoters of global democracy (Thomas Anker) and corporate social responsibility (Andreas Rasche), and of social reform in Greece and Portugal (Miguel Pina e Cunha and Hari Tsoukas). These essays provide interesting, often fascinating reflections on various issues but the extent to which they engage directly with the book's central problematic varies and, at times, little effort goes into tackling the book's core question or exemplifying (or indeed challenging the idea of) European distinctiveness.

Inevitably, in as wide-ranging a volume as this, one could quibble about a few more issues. One might question whether the book is representative of 'European' research in that it is based on contributions authored mostly by scholars institutionally anchored in the UK and Scandinavia and generally working in the English language. One could also quibble about perspectives not included in the volume. An example would be the growing body of postcolonial research in European organization studies. This work not only deals with the study of Europe or rather the legacies of European colonialism but also is, in some of its variants, greatly influenced by European schools of thought such as Marxism and post-structuralism. But these are, in the scheme of things, relatively minor quibbles considering the book's intention to capture as wide a topic as that of 'European' research.

From the point of view of IB, the book offers some useful reflections. The first thing that struck me when reading it is that it includes no contributions from IB scholars. There are likely to be various reasons for this, not least the editor's own academic network, but it does beg the question of whether IB scholars are failing to engage with and influence the wider field of Management of which they are a part. There is certainly recognition in the IB community that IB research has not been particularly successful in diffusing its ideas to the wider social sciences and the scope of this volume suggests it does not even reach its next-door neighbours in the field of Management itself, at least its European branch. Part of the problem may be found in

the generally inward-looking and self-referential orientation of IB (Buckley, Doh and Benischke, 2017) and, in this sense, the present volume indirectly reinforces growing calls within the IB community for *transdisciplinarity* (see e.g., Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2017, for a recent effort to encourage IB scholars to engage with the work of organization theorists).

Importantly, the book or rather the European research tradition it discusses highlights the importance of *onto-epistemological pluralism* in scholarly practice. IB has remained intransigently positivistic and largely impervious to the profound postmodernist and postcolonial critiques that have transformed other social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, international relations and, closer to home, organization studies. The *Journal of International Business Studies*, for instance, has thus far published only *one* paper informed by postcolonial theory (Boussebaa, Sinha and Gabriel, 2014) and the other major IB journals do not fare much better. Allied with this onto-epistemological narrowness has been an excessive preoccupation with quantitative analysis – indeed, a growing number of IB scholars now think “the field has lost its way with its push toward quantification” (Birkinshaw, Brannen and Tung, 2011: 576), that “a stifling fixation with quantitative methods has squeezed the life out of IB research” (Delios, 2017: 392). The present volume reminds us of the importance of *context* and of the critical role played by qualitative research methods in understanding it.

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Mehdi Boussebaa
Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow
mehdi.boussebaa@glasgow.ac.uk