

Open research behaviour in management studies: an ideal honoured more in the breach than in the observance

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Introduction and background

Recent debates around academic research's societal contribution have emerged in response to demands for a new "social contract" for science, in particular demanding an increase of benefits for society (Martin, 2003; Sarewitz, 2016). Academia has focused on better understanding the conditions under which researchers engage with society and produce relevant knowledge that can be eventually transferred and applied outside academia (Amara et al., 2018; Perkmann, et al., 2013). Policy-makers have sought to promote relevant research that brings a societal impact, such as the EC, implementing specific programmes within the H2020 encouraging the development of "science with and for society". This centralises the importance of delivering Responsible Research & Innovation for society through public engagement, among others, as a means of stimulating the scientific "contribut[ion] to fostering more societally relevant and desirable research and innovation outcomes to help us tackle societal challenges".

This overall concern about research relevance has been felt across fields of science, stimulating a range of reactions from defensiveness and resistance (e.g. Collini, 2012) to more proactive rethinking strategies positioning public engagement as a positive force by bringing new knowledge into knowledge creation communities (Potts & Harley, 2015). Much research to date has focused on two kinds of response; first the growth of commercialisation and economic development activities around primarily 'hard' sciences, and second, the resistance/challenge responses from the arts & humanities. In soft disciplines, 'everyday engagement' (Sivertsen, 2019) is already widespread as a norm for researchers, where the nature of the research object demands intimate engagement by the researcher, and for which calls for additional engagement can seem instrumental, exogenous and dangerous.

An interesting example in this regard is management sciences (Bartunek & McKenzie, 2017), that emerged from very practical studies of the improvement of business (such as Taylor's (2004) very early time-and motion studies) in which engagement was a *sine non qua*, and that moved from the 1960s onwards to establish itself as a prestigious scientific-academic discipline rather than as something for professional-vocation schools, developing both an infrastructure and also a culture of non-public engagement. Since the 1990s, the discipline of management has been the site of a fascinating good-faith argument about whether it is possible for research to be both rigorous and relevant, undertaken against a feeling that to make the wrong choice might prove fatal for management's long-term academic viability.

This has manifested itself at times in a certain directness of these discussions, such as debates of whether management research lacks relevance to and impact upon business and managerial practices (Banks et al., 2016). Discussions on this topic have addressed whether it is ever possible to reconcile the production of both rigor and relevant research (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Starkey & Madan, 2001). From this debate emerged the ideal type of the "engaged scholars" as an academic that conducts scientific activities taking into account users' needs without compromising scientific rigor (Van De Ven and Johnson, 2006). This ideal type has not been exempt from criticism (Mckelvey, 2006) with much criticism focusing on the point that those advocating relevance and do not themselves always meet the demands of academic rigour, using a naïve autoethnographic approach, writing from their own experience, sometimes as essays or opinion pieces (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014).

We seek to identify the conditions that research and its context must fulfil so that the former be both rigorous and relevant. We specifically focus on conditions of relevance, noting that conditions for rigor are signalled within academic communities. We contend that ‘relevance’ requires that the potential non-academic users can absorb academic knowledge, and following Olmos Peñuela et al. (2015, 2016), we use the condition of open research behaviours as antecedent to relevance. Open research behaviours are those in various kinds of research micro-practice in which academics consider non-academic interests, needs and/or make use of non-academic knowledge. The progressive nature of science means that the resultant research remains cognate with non-academic users’ interests because of this link via the non-academic knowledge.

Our heuristic has two main elements, that these open research practices (ORPs) are antecedent to the creation of usable knowledge, and that ORPs are found in five different research practices, namely the reflection, inspiration, planning, execution and societal dissemination practices. Incorporating users’ interests, needs or knowledge into academic research processes contributes to the **usability** of that knowledge, even if the eventual use of that knowledge is determined by circumstances outwith academic control. This provides a mechanism to explore this tension, and ask whether management academics who are undertaking rigorous research are also able to carry out their research practices in an open way.

Research goal

Our research goal is to identify the necessary conditions and elements for management researchers to have an open research behaviour.

Methodology

We use an instrumental (Stake, 1995) and explanatory hermeneutic causal-mechanism approach (Gerring, 2010; Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010; Machamer & Craver, 2000) to identify the necessary conditions and elements for researchers to have an ORB. On one hand, an already concluded first exploratory stage consists of both purposive and snowball sampling voice-recorded six 40-to-90-minute formal prospective interviews and five voice-recorded 11-to-28-minute informal conversations with researchers in the field of management. Either oral or written consents have been obtained for recording interviews. On the second hand, a forthcoming stage consists in interviewing researchers

For the purposes of this research, we have defined our case studies or unit of analysis as a research project which has been triggered or initiated within an academic setting by a researchers (PI), and whose results have been transferred to the society in an applied way. We are now in the process of finding the case studies. In order to do it, we have emailed to 58 directors of Departments of Management of both public and private universities between 15 January and 1 April 2019. So, far 42 directors have confirmed us that they have forwarded our recruiting message to their research staff in their department.

We have designed our analysis based on the “open behaviour” conceptual framework (Olmos-Peñuela et al., 2015, 2016). Both causal and descriptive codes (Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Miles, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1996) will be created in NVivo 11 Plus to conduct both the inductively and deductively hermeneutic analyses of the interviews of the case studies.

Preliminary findings

This research is currently ongoing, and we have preliminary findings. The recurrent finding is that researchers, despite believing that research results should be transferred to the society, they find challenges to do it, which some of them clash with the Spanish reward system of science, which only rewards publications and not knowledge transfer. We therefore find that.

Conclusion and discussion

The analysis of this research is at a very early stage, thus, conclusions and discussions are now speculative. However, we dare to anticipate very cautiously that; first, there are few cases, which fit with the case-study boundaries that we have set. This means that ORB hardly happens. Second, changes in the reward system of science may be necessary to motivate academic research, which is societally relevant with outcomes that can be transferred to the society (private or public organisations), in order to solve current problems. Thus, the current research evaluation in Spain may seek and accomplish the quality of research, but we cast doubt on the fact that improves the relevance of research for the whole society.

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