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TRIPLE-ACCREDITED, WORLD-RANKED

Advancing Literature Review Methodology through Rigour, Generativity, Scope and Transparency

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ABSTRACT

The *International Journal of Management Reviews* (IJMR) is proud to offer a special section for articles that address methods and methodologies associated with undertaking literature reviews. In this editorial, we share our goals and aspirations for this special section. Drawing upon the motivations and objectives set out in 2020 and 2021 IJMR editorials, this editorial first discusses what potential benefits such an ongoing special section can bring to management and organization research in the longer term. In the next two sections, we detail what editors expect to see in the submissions we receive, and we also elaborate on some general and specific publication criteria as to how editors and reviewers will assess submissions related to methodology discussion. We hope this editorial will help authors avoid the disappointment of a rejection and encourage them to develop rigorous, innovative and impactful methodological advances and discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The *International Journal of Management Reviews* (*IJMR*) is excited to introduce a special section for articles that address methods and methodologies associated with undertaking literature reviews. The idea of launching a methodology-focused special section was initiated by Dermot Breslin and Katie Bailey (current and former Co-Editors in Chief, respectively), and was further promoted and supported when Jamie Callahan and Marian Iszatt-White joined Breslin as Co-Editors in Chief (see Breslin & Bailey, 2020; Breslin, Callahan & Iszatt-White, 2021). We are motivated to launch this special section by a set of factors from both the 'push' and 'pull' sides. These factors also serve as potential areas where the special section can have a long-term impact on management and organization research.

On the 'push' side, several factors are driving the need for this new section. The most important criterion for publication in *IJMR* is that the manuscript offers a sound theoretical or conceptual contribution. In order to do this, the chosen methodological approach needs to be robust and analytical; demonstrating a robust and analytical approach keeps pushing us to think of *best practices* in order to undertake a literature review professionally. As PhD candidates and early career researchers embark on their professional academic careers, they frequently extract their literature review chapters from their theses or dissertations and submit them to IJMR. However, such submissions often meet with a high failure rate, mainly because the "methods [are] poorly explained or inappropriate" (Jones & Gatrell, 2014: 255). When sending out the disappointing rejection-decision letters, we are always mindful of an important academic community mission to build capacity in PhD development for best practices in conducting literature reviews. We hope that the introduction of the methodology special section will contribute to the training and learning of doctoral researchers in this important area.

Also important as a push factor is the need to support the development of a sound theoretical or conceptual contribution within manuscripts more generally. Recent research has

highlighted the important role played by literature reviews in advancing theory (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020; Post el al., 2020). Literature reviews can identify a missing or neglected theme (Rowe, 2014), challenge taken-for-granted assumptions (Nadkarni et al., 2018), clarify constructs (Post et al., 2020), problematize a literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) and transfer theories from other disciplines (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020). These theoretical advances are grounded in a thorough review of existing research (Hoon & Baluch, 2019), and based on a reinterpretation of that literature through novel creative insights (van Knippenberg, 2012). This special section will seek to better understand the methodological processes at play when theorizing through literature reviews.

On the 'pull' side, although there has been an increasing number of journals publishing review articles, methodological advice on how to properly conduct a theory-driven literature review is particularly limited (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Breslin & Bailey, 2020; Kunisch et al., 2018). Also, the field of literature reviews has quickly incorporated a wide range of cutting-edge approaches and digital techniques. Computational methods allow the reviewer to increase the scope of literature reviewed, using algorithms for text mining and machine learning to support the analysis of the content (Antons et al., 2021). However, many of these new methods tend to result in descriptive reviews, with the underlying methods being an algorithmic black box. Furthermore, these papers often fail to present the kind of robust conceptual or theoretical developments we require for publication in *IJMR*. Raising the profile of new approaches as they emerge, and encouraging the development of new techniques, thus ensuring they are effectively passed on to authors and reviewers (Breslin & Bailey, 2020) is a significant aim of this new section. As Editors, we assert that *IJMR*, a flagship journal in publishing literature reviews, should not only take responsibility for keeping pace with new technique developments and broadcast novel methods to our community, but also should take the lead in offering

methodological guidance on how to undertake high-quality, critical literature reviews, and how to utilize them to further the understanding of the domain being reviewed.

The remainder of this editorial is structured as follows. In the next section, we discuss the different approaches to reviewing literature currently in use, and the value and purpose of each. We then consider the scope and aims of the new special section, and the underpinning criteria for successful submissions. Finally, we offer some concluding remarks which draw together some key points for authors intending to submit a methodology paper to *IJMR* to bear in mind. We look forward to receiving a wealth of innovative and robust contributions in the not too distant future.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

Before articulating the expectations and scope of the new methodology section, we first want to make clear that reviews can come in a variety of forms, and even combinations of forms. All approaches have potential to contribute to theory in different ways. As a result, we welcome any type of review, as long as the approach to the review is articulated clearly and the outcome of the review includes a theoretical or conceptual contribution. Some examples of types of reviews currently in use are outlined below (see Table 1).

The Narrative Review. A narrative review is based on informal mechanisms for organizing and analyzing the literature (Hammersley, 2001), where the review scholar begins with a small number of papers on a theme, which are then used to identify further research related to the topic at hand (Jones & Gatrell, 2014). The reviewer thus follows different lines of enquiry as they expand their literature search, increasing their reading and understanding of a field through a snowballing approach. Narrative approaches thus allow the researcher to follow their nose, and investigate different topics and sub-topics as their knowledge expands. The approach can be appropriate when reviewing a topic across diverse disciplines (Snyder,

2019), as it is not constrained by predetermined selection criteria. Furthermore, this approach may be appropriate when developing theory at different levels of abstraction. For example, narrative reviews can cross disciplinary boundaries, transfer theoretical ideas across domains (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020) and connect different silos of work (Hoon & Baluch, 2019). In this sense, the narrative review can be guided by a process of theory building with the literature search, for example, developing alongside the emergence of theory. However, given its informal and incremental nature, narrative reviews have been criticized for including the implicit biases of the author (Tranfield et al., 2003). Critics also argue that such reviews can lack thoroughness and systematicity, with arguments being based on flawed or selective assumptions (Snyder, 2019). In addition, the theoretical ideas put forward will depend on the path followed in the process of discovery and, with this, the unique selection of papers which are read and reviewed. As a result, important and relevant research may be missed. To address these limitations, review scholars need to be transparent and reflexive in the approach they follow. Whilst considerable advances have been made in our understanding of systematic review approaches, much remains to be learned about the methods employed by narrative review scholars, and we welcome contributions in this area.

The Integrative Review. The integrative review seeks to overcome some of the shortcomings of narrative approaches, by being more systematic in its literature search. Integrative reviews thus seek to review, critique, and synthesize "representative" literature to generate new theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Cronin & George, 2021; Torraco, 2016). In so doing, the approach aims to balance both the generative power of the narrative process, whilst being more systematic in the process of integration of the literature. Integrative reviews therefore present a clear methodology regarding their search and selection criteria, including where the literature was found, when the search was conducted, who completed the search, what keywords were used in the search, the number of articles found, and why papers were

included or excluded (Callahan, 2010). In so doing, these reviews attempt to "systematically trace much (or maybe even all) of the literature on a selected topic back to its roots" (Callahan, 2010, p. 301). It is claimed that integrative reviews have a methodology which allows others to replicate the review (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020).

However, this process of literature integration does more than describe the "state of the science" in a rigorous replicable manner: it goes beyond this to advance new insights and contributions to theory through the integration and critical evaluation by, for instance, putting forward a new conceptual framework, or integrating and/or critiquing the literature (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2018; 2020). Drawing on the metaphor of forest and trees, the integrative review involves stepping back from individual "trees" within a forest to evaluate what we have learned about this particular "grove". This exercise can help identify what remains unanswered, or the central debates within an area of research. Cronin and George (2021) go further to argue that the integrative review synthesizes knowledge across domains, countering a tendency for disciplinary silos.

Yet, the incorporation of both processes of integration and insight generation within integrative reviews is challenged by others. Alvesson and Sandberg (2020), for example, critique the integrative review's ability to advance knowledge based on a "representative description[s] of a field" (Elsbach & Van Knippenberg, 2020, p. 1). Instead they argue that reviews should "critically interrogate and reimagine existing literature in order to generate new and 'better' ways of thinking about specific phenomena" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1290). It is also unclear how new theoretical insights are generated through this process of "integration". Snyder (2019, p.336) even argues that this process is beyond the reach of many scholars as it requires "advanced skills, such as superior conceptual thinking". Unpacking this process of integration is therefore important for our understanding of this review methodology.

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR). A systematic literature review uses a well-defined methodology to "identify, analyze and interpret all available evidence related to a specific research question in a way that is unbiased and (to a degree) repeatable" (Rowe, 2014). In practice, all review approaches contain methods which are systematic to some degree (Hiebl, 2021), and indeed systematicity may be seen as a continuum (Simsek et al., 2021). The emphasis in the SLR is on producing a review which is rigorous, transparent and replicable. By using explicit and systematic methods, bias can be minimized, thus providing reliable findings (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). The approach seeks to enhance "the legitimacy and authority of the resultant evidence".

In this sense, the aim of a literature review is to map and assess the existing intellectual territory (Tranfield et al., 2003), with the aim of providing a comprehensive resource for practicing scholars working within the reviewed domain. Shepherd and Suddaby (2017) even claim to develop a coherent tool for theorizing based on a systematic review of the literature on theory building in management. The SLR therefore aims to identify all empirical evidence that fits a set of pre-specified inclusion criteria and to answer a particular research question or hypothesis (Snyder, 2019). In this manner, a systematic approach can be appropriate when one wishes to synthesize evidence to inform policy and practice in a discipline (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The guiding research question of an SLR is more specific and well-defined than narrative or integrative approaches. As a result, the approach may not be appropriate when reviewing a broad topic that has been conceptualized and studied differently in diverse disciplines (Snyder, 2019). The SLR may be ill-suited to research questions that are less well-defined or when the review seeks to develop theory through a more explorative process. Understanding the relationship between systematicity and processes of generativity will be key to advancing review methodology in this area.

The Meta-analysis. A meta-analysis is an approach which integrates findings from a range of studies using quantitative methods to make an estimate of effect size about a given set of relationships (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2018; Tranfield et al., 2003). It can produce strong conclusions about particular relationships under study, providing a sufficiently large number of observations from prior studies is available. It is claimed that meta-analyses are less subjective than other review approaches through a well-defined quantitative integration of findings (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2018).

In a meta-analysis, each study is abstracted and coded, and findings are subsequently transformed into a common metric to calculate the desired overall effect size (Snyder, 2019). Meta-analyses are therefore particularly well suited when the review seeks to answer a specific empirical question. However, difficulties in the approach can arise when integrating different types of studies with different methodological approaches (Tranfield et al., 2003). Furthermore, the meta-analysis is limited to specific relationships of interest for which a sufficient number of quantitative studies is available (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020). As a result, "more nuanced readings of qualitative evidence" are not possible (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020, p.1287). Finally, similar to the SLR, this review approach assumes a well-defined research question can be posed before the review has started.

In summary, different approaches are suited to different types of research questions, and each can develop theory in different ways. However, much remains to be understood about how such processes unfold, how theoretical insights arise, and how this need for generativity is balanced with the need for rigour and systematicity. This new special section in *IJMR* offers the space for this much-needed research.
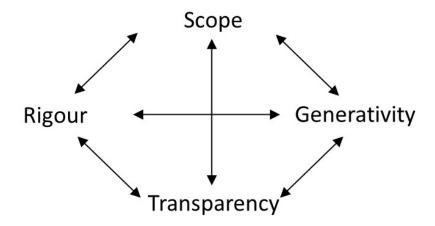
Table 1. Overview of the Different Types of Literature Reviews

Type	What is it?	Strengths	Weaknesses
Narrative Review	Informal process of reviewing a literature based on incremental expansion of knowledge.	Literature search is adapted alongside the development of theory through a process of discovery.	Approach taken includes the implicit biases of the author and limited to emergent cited literature.
Integrative Review	Process of reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing a "representative" literature to generate new frameworks and perspectives.	Seeks to combine the generative power of narrative reviews, alongside a systematic approach in the integration of literature.	Unclear how new theoretical insights are generated through the process of integration.
Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	An approach which identifies, analyzes and interprets all available evidence related to a specific research question in a way that is unbiased and replicable.	Uses a set of explicit and systematic methods, to minimize bias in the search and synthesis of literature, thus improving the transparency, and rigor of the review process.	May not be appropriate when reviewing a broad topic, when research questions are less well-defined or when the review seeks to develop theory through a more explorative process.
Meta-Analysis	Review approach which integrates findings from a range of studies to make an estimate of effect size about a given set of relationships.	Can produce strong conclusions about particular relationships under study, using a method which is less subjective than other review approaches.	Limited to specific empirical questions for which enough studies are available, and problematics for different types of studies with different methodological approaches.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR LITERATURE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Kunisch et al (2018) suggest that several issues require our attention across the whole process of literature reviews, including the purpose of a review, the data selection process, the assessment and synthesis methods, and the reporting and findings. We extend this call and, with specific reference to theory-driven literature reviews, outline four interrelated areas where further methodological research is needed namely, rigour, generativity, scope and transparency (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Towards the Theory-Driven Review Methodology

Rigour

Prior research has made significant advances in promoting the rigour of the literature review process (Rowe, 2014; Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). Scholars stress the need for accuracy, precision, trustworthiness and replicability (Snyder, 2019). However, rigour has different meanings for different review approaches. Traditional measures of rigour within a post-positivist frame of reference relate to reliability, validity and generalizability, but research within the social sciences now originates from much broader epistemological positionings, including constructionist, interpretivist, critical, and postmodern research paradigms. Such measures as credibility, dependability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were developed as analogues for articulating validity, reliability and generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as a means to establish 'value' for qualitative methods. Those reviewing from critical or postmodern perspectives may be inclined to seek a transformational validity grounded in deconstruction, moral commitment, perspective diversity, and social action (Eisenhart, 2006). Further, some of the underlying premises of post-positivist research, such as generalizability for example, may be seen as complete anathema within the search for situated meaning by constructionist researchers. Thus, the need for nuance in evaluating rigour in the context of literature review methodologies becomes paramount.

Adopting the more traditional terminology, methodological reliability refers to the extent to which the literature review results can be reproduced when the review process is repeated under the same conditions. In contrast, methodological validity encompasses the extent to which the method used to perform a literature review aligns with accurate procedures and reportable standards. Based on our observations during the *IJMR* review process, we have often read reviewers' criticisms of problematic searching, incomplete screening, biased coding processes, and inappropriate analytical procedures. These key processes in undertaking literature reviews raise concerns about the overall credibility of the work if not undertaken with sufficient rigour.

For more systematic review approaches, rigour might be enhanced using Krippendorff's (2004) three principles. The first refers to stability, which means that the researchers code the same contents of a focal study consistently over time. The second aspect is reproducibility, that is, multiple raters can reach agreement when assessing the same contents of a focal study. The last stresses accuracy, which highlights the procedural justification (e.g., performing coding in line with prior settings or a codebook). However, it is unclear what rigour means in other review methods. Furthermore, how do these techniques change as one theorises through literature review? Theorising is a generative process, and balancing the need for generativity and rigour will differ for each review approach. We expect the new section to contribute to our understanding of robustness and credibility in theory-driven reviews.

Generativity

Developing theory through literature reviews is a generative process, as the review scholar re-interprets, re-organises and re-connects the literature in news ways (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020). As the reviewer reads, interprets and synthesises the literature, they identify new theoretical insights (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020; Post et al., 2020), through a

creative process. Opportunities for creative insight will vary depending on the type of research question guiding the review, whether these be exploratory, descriptive, evaluative, integrative, or explanatory (Simsek et al., 2021). Equally the different review approaches noted above will lend themselves in different ways to theory development.

Clearly, creative leaps need to be grounded in a solid, critical and thorough review of the literature, and it is here that generativity intersects with rigour. Without rigour, reviews are harder pressed to achieve generativity—by, for example, failing to juxtapose emerging perspectives, analyse assumptions, clarify constructs, establish boundary conditions, and identify salient governing mechanisms (Simsek et al., 2021). Equally, rigour without the mindfulness of generativity may overly regulate the interpretation and presentation of the literature (Simsek et al., 2021). In this sense, generativity and rigour might be seen as a dialectic in literature review methodology (Farjoun, 2010). Whilst the latter seeks to adhere to literature review protocols and rules, the former seeks to diverge from them, and a tendency towards one part of the dialectic might undermine the other. For example, focusing on the mechanics of search and selection may overshadow the more creative aspects such as synthesizing the literature and developing new insights (Hiebl, 2021). Understanding how generativity and rigour are balanced across the different review approaches will be an important methodological consideration for theory-driven literature reviews.

Scope

There are increasing calls for literature reviews to include literature across the broad scope of multiple domains, and as a result, the review both draws from and speaks to different disciplinary silos (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020; Cronin & George, 2021). This process aims to identify common paths, patterns and directions across the different literatures, with the metaphor of the tree and forest used to illustrate this point (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020).

However, the exponential growth of available literature continues to challenge the work of integration. In addition, the fragmentation of this literature across different disciplines and sub-disciplines in organization and management studies makes it more difficult for scholars to theorise across domains. A number of computational methods have been developed to address this challenge, including text mining and machine learning (Antons et al., 2021; Felizardo et al., 2012).

One might argue that such computational approaches are well suited to the more systematic review methods. However, Antons et al. (2021) argue that the scope of such computational power can work alongside human ingenuity and insights, increasing the generativity of the review process. In this sense, computational methods do not seek to replace the human effort, but to augment information processing and analytical capabilities (Antons et al., 2021). Demonstrating once again the interconnectedness of the elements of our call, it remains unclear, however, how human-to-algorithm interaction plays out in balancing the need for rigour and generativity. Does the creative process of theorizing happen after the broad scope of literature has been read, mined and synthesized, or does this occur alongside these process? For many users, such algorithms will remain a black-box, limiting possibilities for interaction, intervention and insight.

Transparency

Underpinning this discussion of rigour, generativity and scope is the need for transparency in literature review methods. Methodological transparency refers to "the degree of detail and disclosure about the specific steps, decisions, and judgment call made during a scientific study" (Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018: 84). Previous scholars have highlighted the primacy of transparency in literature reviews. It is important for review scholars to be explicit about their search and selection criteria (Torraco, 2016; Callahan, 2014; Tranfield

et al., 2003), or use review protocols, which include details of the search key words, databases and selection criteria, in order to produce an "unbiased search" (Tranfield et al., 2003). However, in a recent review of literatures reviews published in *JOM*, *AMA*, and *IJMR*, Simsek et al. (2021) found that reviews, on average, report less than half of the systematic practice items they tracked in their study. Those literature reviews that did report more rigourous practices and, as a result, were more transparent showed elevated levels of research impact (Simsek et al., 2021). This research points to the link between transparency and the robustness and credibility of the review produced.

Equally, the need for transparency exists as one develops theory from reviews through generative processes. The review scholar makes connections between the literature and, in so doing, presents new theoretical insights. However, few scholars describe the creative processes of insight followed in published reviews. This need for transparency is accompanied by a drive for reflexivity on the part of the review scholar, as they consider the different choices they have made from the search, selection, interpretation and synthesis of the literature. Finally, as review methods become increasingly automated, there is a need to open the black box, as noted above.

We therefore call for manuscripts that address methodological transparency through methodological debate essays or techniques for enhancing the transparency of literature reviews. Drawing upon the contemporary terrain of knowledge, literature review studies are used to develop novel insights and theoretical perspectives. However, when authors intentionally hide the results of previous studies or unintentionally omit important conclusions in the literature, their findings are inferior in credibility and trustworthiness (Aguinis et al., 2018). For example, a lack of transparency in meta-analysis has long been criticized for the potential risk of data manipulation (DeSimone et al., 2020; Wanous, Sullivan, & Malinik, 1989) and a systematic literature review is only as rigorous as the reporting of its search parameters and description of raw data (e.g., journal articles, monographs, collected works) analysis (Belur,

2018). Although transparent reporting has already been commonly recognized as a primary virtue of scholarship, numerous factors erode the transparency of a review, such as insufficient information about the scope of the search, ambiguous details around the review process, and concerns for article length requirements (DeSimone et al., 2020).

In summary, we see the need to understand and unpack the interrelated areas of rigour, generativity, scope and transparency. Literature reviews continue to be at the forefront of theory development in organisation and management studies, as reflected in the high impact factors of papers published in theory-driven review journals such as *IJMR*. These advances need to be supported by continuing research in literature review methods in order to ensure the value of our published work is recognised.

TOWARDS METHODOLOGICAL HOLISM

Building on the factors discussed above, we call for a holistic view of developing the methodologies used for literature reviews. We argue that methodology development is not isolated craftwork, but rather an interconnected, networked and orchestrated process of 'methodological holism'. Furnari and colleagues (2020) propose a theorizing logic toward disentangling the interdependent explanatory factors of complex phenomena. We suggest that the methodology development process should contribute to the various stages of scoping, linking and crystallizing as interconnected components of the whole. We illustrate our points as follows:

Scoping. Since one of the fundamental goals in undertaking review studies is to synthesise the state of field knowledge, the scope of the incorporated literature plays a vital role in conducting any literature review. Scoping is, thus, the action associated with the notion of 'scope' noted above. Yet, based on our editorial experience, we observe that one of the major

flaws of review papers is the lack of review comprehensiveness for the given research question. This detrimental issue does not mean that we suggest that the authors should necessarily consider the grey literature, such as book chapters, news articles, and publications via social media (cf., Adams et al., 2017); rather editors and reviewers question whether the number of relevant journal articles covered in the studies is sufficient and/or whether seminal sources or ideas are actually to be found in the grey literature. To ensure the comprehensiveness of reviews, *IJMR* editors and reviewers make an efficacious evaluation of each submitted manuscript on the basis of: a) whether the review is up-to-date; and b) whether the critical analysis of the literature surveyed is complete. We have identified several behaviours that may contribute to an unconvincing claim of a comprehensive scoping: these are inaccurate keywords, a severely limited time period, limited search sources or databases (e.g., databases for only collecting journal articles *versus* databases for including other grey literature), and lack of clarity in the presentation of the methodology part. Overall, the scoping of the review needs to ensure that any theoretical claims made are based on a thorough, comprehensive and critical review of relevant literature.

Linking. The notion of linking is important in ensuring that the methodology development process can elaborate on "how and why the attributes specified in the scoping stage connect to each other" (Furnari et al., 2020: 20). Over the past two decades, *IJMR* has received a large number of submissions that claim to be "systematic reviews" or "syntheses" but that treat a particular topic or concept in an overly isolated manner. In other words, the boundary of the topic is so narrowly defined that the analysis lacks sufficient linking with other attributes surrounding the focal topic. Apart from linking concepts (e.g., systematic reviews) or relationships (e.g., meta-analysis), linking can also be evident in the knowledge flow between studies. For example, recent methodological advice from Anderson and Lemken (2020) suggests that a set of research questions on literature review studies can link the focal study to

subsequent works. That is, as a way of proceeding towards better theory development, a literature review study can explore "how important ideas are used by and spread from a source text to subsequent citing works" at a specific and detailed level (Anderson & Lemken, 2020, p.1). Ultimately, linking and connecting themes across different literatures is key to making the creative insights needed to develop theory (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020), and in this sense, underpins processes of generativity noted above.

Crystallizing. This final step is important for contributions to the methodology special section in *IJMR*. *IJMR* aims to be the "leading journal in the field of theory-based review papers" (Breslin, Callahan, & Iszatt-White, 2021: 5). To continually position the journal in this regard, we particularly seek articles with methodological advances on how a review leads to the development or extension of a theory. Callahan (2014) referred to this as the 'contributive' (p. 274) characteristic of rigourous literature reviews and we see this as the crystallization of the insights gained from the review process into a conceptual or theoretical contribution. Whilst this process of crystallization has been less emphasized in the past (Breslin & Bailey, 2020; Kunisch et al., 2018) we now recognize it as one of the most valuable parts of a literature review (cf. Breslin & Gatrell, 2020). For example, we often find that a bibliometric co-citation approach has advantages of scoping (e.g., comprehensively searching key concepts across the literature) and linking (e.g., illustrating knowledge flows or networks surrounding a particular concept), but that many submissions that have used this approach have been over-descriptive and lack theoretical insights (Breslin & Bailey, 2020). (This is not a criticism of bibliometric reviews per se and, as noted above, we hope to see manuscripts taking this approach, but with a 'conceptual kicker' crossing our desks in the near future.) In summary, we suggest that methodology studies should consider methodological integration, and especially the issue of crystallization, as a core component in advancing our understanding of what makes a good theory-driven review paper.

PUBLICATION CRITERIA FOR METHODOLOGY SPECIAL SECTION

In line with our generalist and pluralist approach as a journal, we are eager to encourage diverse, rigorous, important and interesting discussions in management and organization research in general, and methodological advancement for this special section in particular. For any prospective author who is interested in participating in discussing methodologies used for literature reviews, the following key points may help you self-evaluate whether your submission can be regarded as:

1. Being critical in its analysis.

   Does the choice of the methodology critique, challenge or contrast existing methodologies, or present interesting perspectives on how the quality of literature reviews may be improved?

2. Being timely in its insights.

   Is the methodological discussion up-to-date? Papers submitted to *IJMR* should include all relevant contemporary research, which in practice this means that authors should ensure their search incorporates work published in the last 6 to 12 months prior to the date of submission.

3. Being thorough in its coverage.

   Is there a synthesis and evaluation of the accumulated state of knowledge in the proposed methodology, summarizing and highlighting current and emerging insight, while stressing strengths and weaknesses of prior work using that methodology?

4. Being rigorous in its positioning and presentation.

   Is there a coherent logic and rigorous rationale provided for the proposed methodology, and for how it adds value to the development of theory-driven literature reviews? Does

the submission articulate the strength and weakness of a particular approach to studying the field of organization and management research?

5. Being original in its contribution.

   Does the submission seek to make a novel contribution that sheds new light on review studies and advances our practices in conducting literature reviews?

6. Being supportive of the remit of *IJMR*.

   Does any methodological advancement offered by the submission help readers (and potential authors) enrich their knowledge of how to improve scoping, linking and/or crystallizing in theory-driven literature reviews?

All kinds of methodological innovations that aim to advance the quality and impact of a literature review are particularly welcomed in this new section. While the conventional, manual-based, systematic, literature review remains dominant in the mainstream (see Hiebl, 2021), accelerating methodological improvements and innovations have been witnessed in reviewing the literature across the management domain (Aguinis et al., 2018; Gaur & Kumar, 2018). We have been particularly interested to observe an increase in the number of bibliometric reviews submitted to *IJMR* in recent years.

But as with all innovations they need to be fit for purpose if they are to add value – in the case of bibliometric reviews, we would hope to see advances in how this approach can be utilized as the basis for developing a theoretical or conceptual contribution to our understanding of the topic area. A descriptive analysis of the field, however comprehensive and rigourous, is insufficient for publication within the journal. (Alas, this has been a common cause of rejection for bibliometric reviews in the past, but we would encourage authors to take them the extra (conceptual) step that will bring success.) Whilst we are keen to stimulate the emergence of new review techniques we recognize that, like any scientific or social scientific application, the process of rolling out a methodological innovation is not straightforward; rather, it adopts a

trial-and-error approach. Before we can safely claim *best practice* in using any new techniques or methods, we encourage debates and dialogues on new literature review methods.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A review study has long been one of the important mechanisms for integrating, synthesizing and consolidating the state of knowledge in the management field. However, this function can be diluted by fragmented reviews (e.g., Kunisch et al., 2018; Snyder, 2019) and reviews that do no more than describe what we already know. Thus, robust, rigorous review methodologies are required to capture the "consensus and dispute" in different research streams and to offer new insights and directions for taking the field forwards. In line with this call, we would summarize the core aims of the methodology special section as follows:

- With regard to conducting literature reviews, we encourage manuscripts that critique or challenge existing methodologies, or seek to advance readers' understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of new approaches.

- With regard to the presentation of literature reviews, we welcome submissions that make an original and innovative contribution to debate around how literature reviews may be undertaken, and how the quality of literature reviews may be improved.

- We urge that submissions to this special section should not merely replicate points that have been made in existing studies, but instead seek to make a meaningful contribution toward theory-driven literature reviews going forward.

- We stress that we do not accept articles that focus on other aspects of methodology (e.g., empirical methodologies), other than those used in reviews.

Unlike other leading review journals, *IJMR* is methodologically agnostic in regard to the methodology used to review literature. As an editorial team we would assert that production of a rigorous and impactful theory-driven literature review study must be built on a solid and

robust literature review methodology, but would not be prescriptive as to what that methodology should be. In this editorial, we have elaborated what motivated us to launch this special section, what potential benefits such a section can bring to management and organization research in the longer term, and what we expect in, and how we will assess, future submissions related to methodology discussion.

With the advent of this new special section, we are looking forward to welcoming methodology-focused articles. Authors who are interested in pursuing this worthwhile pathway to publishing in *IJMR* are encouraged to get in touch directly with *IJMR*'s Methodology Special Section Editor, Di (David) Fan (dfan@swin.edu.au). In conclusion, *IJMR* is always keen to publish impactful literature reviews that extend and develop our knowledge on and understanding of a particular topic in the field of management.

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