

EDITORIAL

I am delighted to be invited to contribute this Editorial comment for the *Journal of Management & Administration* to consider contemporary opportunities and challenges to progress our managerial research in 2024. Looking back at some



critical themes influencing this field, the impact of the COVID pandemic has had an enormous impact on our work. In his editorial for the journal in 2021, Prof. Muhammad Hoque remarked how COVID had changed our personal and research practices causing us to reflect upon old priorities and develop new ways of working. The pandemic has brought about the greatest disaster, with the most catastrophic effect on individuals, communities and nations since the global influenza outbreak in 1918–1920, which killed more people than the First World War. But we are a research community, so our role is to reflect upon and learn from such an event and see what lessons we can take forward. This much is apparent from the out-pouring of research in every field—from medicine to management—

analysing and evaluating the impact of, and changes related to, how COVID has rearranged ‘normality’. In our field of management research, new debates have emerged regarding the organisation of the organisation itself, particularly how and where people work. From an advanced economy perspective, this has revolved around the usage of technology to facilitate distance working, which has become a more accepted mode of employment (Lal et al., 2023). Exploring the impact of this upon firm performance, individual well-being, local economies et cetera has informed a multitude of research activity in many fields. And indeed, that trend is reflected in this journal by Nzimande et al. (2023) and Elkington & Ruttenberg-Rosen (2023), who focus on the residual effects of COVID upon academic staff retention and higher education leadership respectively.

As we go forward in this debate, in my opinion as a journal editor and researcher, we now need to reflect the trend shown in these two papers – recovery in the

post-COVID period and how in the management research discipline, new ways of leading, working and doing business are emerging. Some of these will be for the better—so, for example, for many women, home working can be very positive to improve their work-life balance—there are also benefits for the environment with reduced traffic levels. Yet for others, it can be very isolating whilst organisations lose the synergistic effect of the office exchange promoting new ideas and debate. For emerging economies, the impact upon the informal economy, the mainstay for economic activity and the majority of labour, was devastating. In the case of South Africa for example, Khambule (2022) documents the impact of the virus upon informal employees and the self-employed noting the increase in precarity, poverty and a broader damaging effect upon the wider economy given the extent of informality. Of course, the question we now have to explore is how are such sectors recovering, what is the role for public policy here and how should that be managed.

Another critical theme which must be addressed by the managerial research community is that of AI – this is already changing how organisations operate and how they gather information; it is replacing labour, acting as a surveillance tool and some claim, will soon have the capacity to take over economies rendering many established organisational practices and strategies redundant as AI homogenises thought and action (Nohumba et al., 2023). Theories of management analytics, the gathering and application of big data, the ethics of such manipulation will be central to our research activities. Of course, the opportunities offered by AI are enormous but what kind of research do we need to critically evaluate the potential damage and benefits of such technological advances? As a community of management researchers we have a responsibility to generate meaningful evidence to join this debate.

Finally, in this brief overview, the greatest challenge we all face and must address is that of climate change. Whilst an ecological disaster, its roots are embedded in economics and management; the pursuit of growth, the extraction of materials to build products, the commodification of natural resources, the focus on exploitation and profit are the fuel for the climate crisis. Yet, how do we effectively support human creativity and human progress whilst protecting the planet? – this is as much a managerial challenge as it is an ecological one. And indeed, all of these issues are linked – COVID exposed the fragility of how we ‘do business’, when markets stopped operating in the normative fashion, the environment had a brief moment of recovery, and indeed, if the power and energy used to explore and generate AI was halted, this would remove copious amounts of carbon from our atmosphere at a stroke. Of course, we cannot turn back the clock but our role is to ensure it works better in the future.

I have only briefly touched on a few issues amongst many more – poverty, inequality, finance issues, conflict et cetera. Just this short exploration, however, reveals the plethora of opportunities to progress the broad field of management and share your work with others, so we look forward to your submissions to the journal to disseminate your research in 2024!

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