

Leveraging intersections in management research and practice

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This issue of the *Sinergie - Italian Journal of Management* contains the best papers presented at the Sinergie-SIMA 2021 Annual Conference titled “Leveraging Intersections in Management Research and Practice”, which was organized by the University of Palermo and took place online on June 10-11, 2021. The Conference was held online due to the ensuing conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic at the time. Though in 2021 the digital format imposed by the global sanitary conditions had a strong impact on the participation rates of many of the major international conferences, this meeting was largely participated, with around 350 participants, 52 full papers and 114 extended abstracts presented, and offered a rich and profound perspective of investigation on issues directly connected to the conference theme. A paper development workshop organized the day before the conference to help younger scholars progress in their studies also gathered significant traction and engaged participation.

The theme of the meeting is connected conceptually to the Sinergie-SIMA conferences of the years that preceded it: “Management and Sustainability. Creating Shared Value in the Digital Era” hosted by Sapienza University of Rome in June 2019, and “Grand Challenges: Companies and Universities together for a Better Society” hosted conjointly by the Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies and the University of Pisa in June 2020. In different ways, these conferences have brought our community to engage in research concerning phenomena that represent major societal and economic challenges. The conference held in Palermo complements and embraces in several ways the themes of the conferences previously held in Rome and Pisa, as it attracts attention to the disciplinary, theoretical and methodological framing of research that is able to effectively tackle the societal phenomena discussed in the prior conferences.

As management scholars, we are aware that the legitimacy of our community and profession in society increasingly rests on our ability to generate social and economic value by finding solutions and offering effective and timely guidance to leaders in firms and institutions (Currie *et al.*, 2016; Tihanyi, 2021). This is especially true in face of the extraordinary economic, societal, health and environmental challenges firms, communities and governments are currently tackling worldwide, also as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Muzio and Doh, 2020) and, more recently, of other disruptive dynamics generated in our economic and social context by the war between Russia and Ukraine.

In parallel, management practitioners are increasingly urged to adopt wide-ranging strategies to pursue a multidimensional notion of firm performance (Kotlar *et al.*, 2018); a concept that extends beyond technical

and economic dimensions to embrace a larger set of issues, such as sustainability and societal impact.

Challenges such as these are far too complex to be captured by only a single perspective. In order to shed light on the multifaceted phenomena that underlie firm performance and societal advancement, research is spurred to knowledgeably compare and leverage contributions that derive from adopting different disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016; George *et al.*, 2016), as well as by considering different levels of analysis. Furthermore, there is the fundamental need to orient such scholarly enquiry to concerns of immediate interest for the world of practice.

Anchoring research questions to real-world phenomena allows to appreciate and grasp their multiple dimensions and manifestations. Conscious pluralism and the intentional comparison of the relative contributions offered by different disciplines, theories, methods and levels of analysis offer a way forward for the comprehension of relevant phenomena for management scholars. Though challenging, there is relevant potential to generate sound and impactful research by purposefully leveraging *intersections* between different perspectives in the field of management to study phenomena of interest also to practitioners.

This general invitation has been answered in a variety of ways by the papers collected in this special issue that includes the research selected and awarded by the conferences' scientific committee. All the studies published, independent from their empirical or conceptual nature, make clear research based contributions not only to extant theory in the field of management, but also to practitioners and, at times, also to policy makers. Amongst the major societal challenges faced today, the research contained in this volume contributes mainly to knowledge regards sustainability, globalization, diversity and the effects of the digital revolution. The intersection between different dimensions related to sustainability and circular economy is at the center of the studies offered by both Formisano *et al.* (2022) and Corsini *et al.* (2022), however the level of analysis they focus on and the research methods they deploy differ. The former study contributes to shed light on the way the characteristics connected to smart sustainable cities and circular economy are interconnected with reference to EU cities, suggesting the relevance of adopting a holistic concept in future policy making and city management due to the high degree of mutual influence between the two concepts. The latter focuses on the cognitive frameworks that must be developed in order to carry out a successful transition towards a circular economy model in the HORECA and hospitality industries, underlying the necessity to develop an integrative view of economic and environmental logics and the challenges this transition poses.

A second set of studies in this volume considers corporate sustainability and diversity. Here too, the focus and research methods diverge, whilst the level of analysis in both cases is the firm. In particular, Conte *et al.* (2022) consider social inclusion of disabled users and offer a study that assesses the degree to which corporations are actually enhancing their sustainability by applying international guidelines regards the accessibility of their websites, whilst Ciasullo *et al.* (2022) leverage upper echelon theory to analyze the

relationship between environmental sustainability and green innovation ambidexterity and, the moderating role of women in corporate boards in moderating this relationship.

The challenges connected to diversity are also central to the study of De Masi *et al.* (2022) and Asi *et al.* (2022). The research proposed by De Masi *et al.* (2022) also contributes to the understanding of the role of gender diversity in corporate board decision-making processes, offering an empirical study of the threshold levels of female director presence in corporate boards that trigger the voicing of women's opinions and those that influence the degree to which women voices are heard, also suggesting practical implications for gender quota regulation. Spiritual diversity is central, instead, in the study offered in this volume by Asi *et al.* (2022), in which studies regarding spirituality and values are leveraged to analyze the role of these dimensions in the setting of succession processes in family firms.

The role of leveraging theories to shed light on societal challenges, by using them in original ways to interpret and analyze phenomena that are different from mainstream extant studies and by shifting levels of analysis, characterizes the contributions offered to this volume by Moi *et al.* (2022) and of Martzanis and Hagen (2022). In their study, Moi *et al.* (2022) develop a conceptual framework that considers the evolution of SME strategies in times of crisis from a novel perspective by shifting attention from extant focus on large corporations to small and medium ones pinpointing the specificities of crisis prevention, response and recovery in this setting. Upper echelon theory is used in Matzanis and Hagen (2022) to shed light on the role of entrepreneurial experience for venture internationalization shifting the level of analysis from the individual to the entrepreneurial team.

Globalization and its consequences are central also in the work of Marozzo *et al.* (2022) that offers an empirical study on the relevance of authenticity and traceability of products on the willingness to pay of consumers in a specific agri-food business. Consumer behavior in the light of a major societal challenge is at the center also of the study carried out by Zerbini *et al.* (2022) that digs into consumer behavior and m-commerce in the light of the current digital revolution.

Overall, the portfolio of research published in this special issue offers a multifaceted and intriguing set of stimuli for further studies positioned at the intersection of management theory and practice which we look forward to reading in the future.

The number and quality of contributions received in occasion of the conference, and the identification of the selected and best papers owes tribute to the precious work of many colleagues. Amongst these, particular gratitude goes to the extremely thorough support of the scientific committee of the conference, to my outstanding conference co-chairs - Marta Ugolini and Sandro Castaldo - who have provided exemplar leadership and have built a vibrant and engaged community of Italian management scholars, eager to contribute to this conference notwithstanding the challenges posed by the pandemic. Finally, I'd like to especially thank the local organizing committee - Carlo Amenta, Paolo Di Betta, Gabriella Levanti, Massimo

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