

Alberto Pastore - Marta Ugolini

Dear readers of the *Sinergie Italian Journal of Management*, our management scholars community is currently faced with some challenges of great importance that are inherent in the mechanisms that influence our ability to create value.

Thanks to the work of our academic societies, in recent years we have consolidated our identity and defined our reference principles and objectives: to create value for society and the economy, (in terms of relevance and impact); through research, teaching, third mission and service activities; within a system characterized by ethics, transparency, merit; in an international context that still pays attention to enhancing the specificities and culture of our country; in full synergy with all stakeholders, i.e. companies, institutions, civil society.

These are the principles and goals that guide us, but the path is fraught with obstacles and we are moving within a very complex system.

In recent years, the academic communities of management scholars in Italy and abroad are facing essential issues, chief among which are the crisis in the credibility of knowledge produced in management, due to factors of relevance and integrity, and the need to improve evaluation systems and consequently incentive systems.

There are several international organizations that have recently focused on these problems and their proposed solutions. It is very important for these analyses and the resulting recommendations to be taken up by the various national academic communities and for individual scholars to become aware of them. To date, there is still a gap in awareness on this issue. To fill this gap, we hereby draw attention to IFSAM, RRMB, DORA, which are some of the most interesting sources.

IFSAM is the International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management, with 23 member academies from all continents, including SIMA. Among its activities, IFSAM produces Policy Statements offering guidelines on the most relevant issues affecting the management academy. In this area, when faced with issues concerning the direction and evaluation of research activities, IFSAM identifies a number of recommendations in its recent "Position Statement on management research": "direct research on relevant issues in order to create economic and social value; acknowledge researchers for the value of their scientific production; promote and support scientific journals owned and managed by academic societies; value publications such as research books, research-based didactic books, as well as journals with regional impact; value contributions to management practice and society in the same way as scientific contributions to the development of informal knowledge; promote a perspective on the evaluation of management research that is pluralistic and contextualized"¹.

¹ IFSAM Position Statement on management research, www.ifsam.org

RRBM Responsible Research for Business Management is a network that was established in 2018 to address the challenges of producing credible management knowledge that is ultimately useful in tackling problems that are important for businesses and society. Responsible research ensures the production of credible knowledge that can be used to inform progressive government policies and promote positive business and management practices. Also in 2018, RRMB's Positioning Paper was published, and emphasized that responsible research depends on a complex network (composed of researchers, journals, editors, faculty evaluation committees, senior faculty, deans, funding and evaluating agencies, school or university ranking publishers, business school academies and associations, practitioners and policymakers). According to RRMB, this network must "support, recognize, and reward the following seven principles in a coordinated fashion.

1. Service to Society: Development of knowledge that benefits businesses and the broader society, locally and globally, for the ultimate purpose of creating a better world.
2. Valuing Both Basic and Applied Contributions: Contributions in both the theoretical domain to create fundamental knowledge, and in applied domains, to address pressing and current issues.
3. Valuing Plurality and Multidisciplinary Collaboration: Diversity in research themes, methods, forms of scholarship, types of inquiry, and interdisciplinary collaboration to reflect the plurality and complexity of business and societal problems.
4. Sound Methodology: Research that implements sound scientific methods and processes in both quantitative and qualitative, or both theoretical and empirical, domains.
5. Stakeholder Involvement: Research that engages different stakeholders in the research process without compromising the independence of inquiry.
6. Impact on Stakeholders: Research that has an impact on diverse stakeholders, especially research that contributes to better businesses and a better world.
7. Broad Dissemination: Diverse forms of knowledge dissemination that collectively advance basic knowledge and practice².

DORA, The Declaration on Research Assessment established in 2012, has become a worldwide initiative covering all scholarly disciplines and all key stakeholders including funders, publishers, professional societies, institutions, and researchers. The declaration recognizes the need to improve the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. Within the Declaration, "a number of themes run through these recommendations:

- eliminate the use of journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, in funding, appointment, and promotion considerations;

² RRMB Position Paper, www.rrbm.network

- assess research based on its own merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which the research is published;
- capitalize on the opportunities provided by online publication (such as relaxing unnecessary limits on the number of words, figures, and references in articles, and exploring new indicators of significance and impact)³.

As anticipated, thanks to the activities of the Academic Societies, the debate on these issues is high on the agenda even in our country. Within SIMA, an intense debate on the subject has been open for a number of years, which has led, among other things, to the production of a positioning paper on “The Profession and Career of the Management Scholar”, which offers guidelines for the direction and evaluation of the activities of management scholars in research, teaching, third mission and service activities.

An important discussion in the community and with stakeholders took place at the successful 2023 Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference at the University of Bari and LUM University. In particular, important insights emerged from the panel discussion on “Quality and evaluation in the academic career: the current challenges of the scholarly profession” with contributions from Antonio Uricchio - President of ANVUR, Sandro Castaldo - President of IFSAM, Guido Cristini - Member of CUN Area 13, Alberto Pastore - Founding President of SIMA, Michele Pizzo - President of AIDEA, Alessandro Zattoni - President of EURAM. This meeting focused particularly on the evaluation system and its areas in need of improvement by aiming, on one hand, at ensuring transparency and merit - thus countering unethical behavior and opportunism, and on the other at directing its activity towards the production of value for society and the economy.

The discussion also made it possible to decline some operational proposals for the adjustment of evaluation and selection systems for scholars (e.g., breaking free from the hegemony of the research factor and enhancing other dimensions of the profession, introducing the test for the teaching assessment and the discussion of qualifications and curricula vitae during selections, measurement of real impact, activity for at least three years in the previous role before being eligible to qualify for the next role) and for the system of evaluation of research performance (e.g. introduction of the discussion of publications during selections, replacement of median/thresholds with appropriate productivity standards for NSQ evaluations (ASN), elimination of misuse of journal-centered bibliometric metrics).

As is well known, in the broad field of business studies, “political” action is carried out within the AIDEA, which has assumed the role of a second-level society formed by Scientific Societies in the field since 2018. Important results for Italian business scholars have been achieved in this sphere (e.g., establishment of sub-Gev 13/B, a specific organization with the intent of evaluating research performance for business academies). Two additional relevant guidance documents, which have been prepared by the AIDEA, will be released in the upcoming months. The first stems from the appreciation of the “The profession and career of the management

³ DORA Declaration on Research Assessment, www.sfdora.org

professor” guidelines produced by SIMA.: The AIDEA, which fully valued the work that had been carried out by SIMA, decided to produce a similar guideline entitled “The academic in economic-business disciplines: roles, criticisms, challenges and career evaluation” for the entire community of Italian business scholars. The second document is addressed to our institutional interlocutors and contains precise requests for action to improve the evaluation system at all levels.

Before concluding, we would like to draw attention to one more critical aspect of the research system, which concerns the role of academic journals and their publishing houses. The current problems in this regard are manifold. The system of communicating research results is actually constituted by an oligopoly of large publishers. Researchers are constrained by the dynamics of the “publish or perish” principle, so in order to ensure that their research is valued, they are compelled to deal with the available publication channels and adapt to their logic. In many cases, they are forced to incur publication costs, and the results of their research are not freely accessible to the entire community. Although the system opened up thanks to digitization and open access publications, additional problems related to the multiplication of erroneous and unethical research papers and to wasteful, or ‘predatory’, journals, emerged. Unfortunately, the line of reasoning behind publishing houses or specific publishing initiatives is often based on commercial, rather than scientific, principles. There are now numerous cases of editors and editorial boards of journals being forced to resign due to disagreements with the commercial policies of publishing houses. The extreme pathology in this regard is represented by predatory journals, which tend to become more and more widespread by appealing to the “publish-or-perish” sensibility of less capable researchers who are driven by necessity and opportunism.

As far as these issues are concerned, the orientation of international organizations is quite clear and favors the enhancement of Open Access journals, whose content is available free of charge, and where scholars publish free of charge, while being strongly directed from a scientific point of view by a Scientific Institution or Society, even within a regional context, at times. All these aspects characterize and may be found in the Sinergie Italian Journal of Management.

The process of dissemination of research results is valueable and can be carried out more properly if it is managed within an institutional and scientific system. Such a system should be supported financially and technically by public institutions, and managed scientifically by academic ones.

We have offered just a few thoughts on the challenges to Creating Value in Management Academies. Of course, the game is played at all levels: policies, rules, evaluation and incentive systems, funding, projects, scholarly and associative activities; at the four dimensions of the profession: research, teaching, Third Mission, service activities; at a national and international level; and involving institutional, academic, associative, and support actors. We all participate as individuals and as management scholars. We fortunately do a wonderful job, but let us not forget that we

have to contribute to the creation of value for society and the economy on a daily basis by operating with ethical sense, spirit of service, sense of community, and respect for all our stakeholders.

Alberto Pastore
Marta Ugolini
Creating value in
management academies

Academic or professional positions and contacts

Alberto Pastore

Full Professor of Management
Sapienza University of Roma - Italy
e-mail: alberto.pastore@uniroma1.it

Marta Ugolini

Full Professor of Management
University of Verona - Italy
e-mail: marta.ugolini@univr.it

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