

THOUGHT PIECE

Supporting Impactful and Applicable Business Education: A Call for Greater Collaboration Between Librarians, Faculty, and Publishers

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The case for change in management research and business education

Recent innovations in business-school offerings highlight the evolving field of management education: courses have been diversified, flexible formats for MBA programs have been introduced, program durations have been compressed, MOOCs have been adopted, and technology has made some headway into classrooms. But genuine innovation in classrooms, content, research, and partnerships with business is a sporadic process and is hard to scale and fund. How can business education evolve as practical, actionable, and relevant to the competitive world of work while delivering demonstrable value?

Management theory itself must be shaped and tested in the real world to ensure continued relevance. Management research must engage and reflect current practice to have impact on society at large and affect change. With this context in mind, some of the questions publishers and librarians alike grapple with are:

- Does the academic research article actually equip professionals to make changes in their practice?
- Is research accessible and digestible both within and outside the educational institution?
- Are published research questions shaped by practitioners outside the academy?
- Can we take research to a wider audience, beyond the academic and educational setting, to enable broader impact?
- In what formats should we publish, and what can we embed into our products to make content as engaging as possible for students?

We often hear from librarians and faculty that these questions are top of mind. At Emerald, we believe that faculty, librarians, and publishers should work together to innovate. Substantive applied management research and relevant business education are critically important in this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. Our economic, environmental, and social health need sustainable, ethical business decisions and practices.

When we talk to students to find out what products we should be developing for them, we hear requests that I imagine are familiar to faculty and librarians. Students tell us they are looking for the best of the theoretical and practical worlds: classroom and experiential learning, research and real world case study and insight content, global and local locations in which to learn, and input from academia and professional practice alike. Students are looking for management theories and tried

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and tested methodologies, but they also want to develop critical thinking and analysis skills, and ethical decision-making expertise.

The expectations for business students are great and varied. Students need to have technological fluency and coding skills, know ways to harness the power of the crowd and social media, understand how to work with big data, manage remote staff, utilize various business investment and funding models, and network effectively.

Three questions

I would like you to consider three questions I believe are particularly pertinent for the publisher and the librarian.

The value question: What distinctive value is offered by business schools to students, employers, and the world at large? Now, more than any other time in the last 40 years, the economic value of a business education is questioned. What return on investment can a student expect on, say, an investment of \$50,000? How is that ROI diminished when the student, in the workplace, is being trained again at a cost to the company because their MBA hasn't covered some of the specific skills needed in practice?

A chance for students to step back, reflect, and learn soft skills such as influence, teamwork, and communication is invaluable. Business schools provide an opportunity to learn research methodologies, data analysis, critical thinking, and information collation. Students are able to learn how to present insights as well as report data, to spend a significant amount of time with people and viewpoints from many different backgrounds and cultures. It's a chance for students to find that sweet spot between their personal motivations, what the world needs, what the world will pay for, and what they can do well. The ROI on that begins to look much more positive – both intellectually and economically.

The learning question: How do we flip the classroom to focus on opportunities that provide the greatest ROI? Faculty have refined consistent methods for teaching skills through textbooks, problem sets, and the case method. But as schools look to hone student perspectives, faculty take on the role of coach, bringing out nuances that are best discovered through dialogue and classroom debate. Flipping the classroom means a focus on social and intellectual interactions with a greater emphasis on the student being able to prepare and access the core content outside the classroom. This, of course, presents new challenges to librarians and publishers who are tasked with enabling this kind of blended learning and classroom preparedness.

Emerald is exploring how a publisher can best support the next generation of students in a flipped classroom environment.

- We have spent many thousands of dollars and hours working to make the vast body of content we publish easily accessible and digestible.
- We are investing as much in the skills of our developers and product managers as we did in our core publishing and commissioning staff because we want to develop products that facilitate the discovery of information, rather than wrap it all in a printed book or journal and wait for the student to find it.

- We are exploring machine learning methods to extract and publish single sentence summaries of long-form manuscripts.
- We create audio and video content that broadcast the practical implications of research.
- We are employing writers to produce engaging summaries of research articles that clarify the take-home messages.
- We are asking illustrators to produce an infographic of a 12-page manuscript for those who learn best from visual representations.
- We are creating animations and cartoons to support multiple teaching and learning styles
- We are shifting our focus to publishing formats that best support learning, and thinking of our publication output as knowledge rather than simply a book or a journal. This means developing products like simulations, games, animations, role playing, immersive multimedia presentations of case studies with embedded questions to help students prepare for class.

The relevance and impact of research question: How should business schools disseminate their research insights to influence leading-edge practice? The current tenure and funding systems put pressure on faculty to publish in journals with high impact factors. This value system favors a certain 15% of faculty who are repeatedly accepted in high-ranking titles, a system that encourages applied-research authors to position their work as more theoretical. The traditional format applied to academic articles can make it difficult to express the practical relevance and impact of management research.

This topic is particularly close to our hearts as Emerald's mission is to bring research to life. We want to help our communities make better research-supported decisions, but there is an inherent struggle within this dynamic. We want to maintain the balance between appropriate academic rigor to support tenure and a desire to publish a type and a format of research that is accessible to a wider public of practitioners and policymakers. This misalignment of incentives has recently begun to shift as some funding bodies seek to track the impact of social-science research on wider society. (The effective measurement of impact is separate question.)

Another challenge facing scholarly authors of management research is competing for attention with corporate research departments and consultancies. Companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and Apple are at the forefront of research that serves core products and services. They can contribute to the research corpus, bringing another perspective to the growing management knowledgebase.

A collaborative alliance between academia and industry is attractive. We know such partnerships enhance the quality of research. The most highly cited articles that Emerald publishes are international in their authorship and often the result of collaboration between university and industry. In addition to the positive impact on citations, these endeavors help to keep the research pertinent to practice.

How to move forward – the value proposition in collaboration

Commercial journal publishers are often criticized for unfairly profiting from taxpayer-funded research locked away behind subscription paywalls. But publishers can offer much more value than a broad distribution platform (although the costs and benefits of that shouldn't be underestimated).

Publishers add value by making research easy to find, cite, digest, archive, and share. There is a proliferation of research output, and the audience needs ways to efficiently identify quality content, access and digest, and explore deeper contextual information to gain a true picture of a field. At Emerald, we are investing heavily in content management and enrichment, semantic technologies, new ways of publishing and making data citable, automatic deposits to repositories, and product development. We want to fund innovation and experimentation in content and delivery and provide improved analysis of content usage and benefits.

Publishers also add value by helping and guiding authors. We undertake “how-to” workshops. We offer language services, promote author research, showcase institutional output, and train authors to share their papers and use social media to maximum effect.

Conclusion

The future of business education lies in productive collaborations between business librarians, faculty, and publishers to find the most valuable ways to deliver maximum impact of their research. By working together, we each enhance our individual value. In this context, Emerald is supportive of authors sharing their accepted manuscripts without embargo. We want to raise the visibility of research output and increase discoverability and engagement with content.

As a publisher, Emerald seeks to understand the challenges facing business education, from the perspective of students, faculty, and librarians. We want to support business librarians and faculty, but we, in turn, need your input to steer our publishing programs. Please join us in the conversation!