

# GRAND CHALLENGES, DECOLONIALITY AND MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

*Societal grand challenges are global, yet management scholarship is dominated by the minority world. Tackling grand challenges requires changing – and decolonizing – our scholarship. In this article, we highlight four approaches toward inclusive research partnerships that are collaborative across the minority and majority world: we suggest a movement from ignorance through awareness and integration, and finally toward elevation, and present illustrative examples from three practical cases moving in this direction. We conclude by discussing challenges and pathways toward a decolonial management scholarship that engages inclusively with societal grand challenges.*

**Keywords:** Decoloniality; grand challenges; minority and majority worlds; research partnerships; management scholarship

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## INTRODUCTION

The world faces grand challenges induced by climate change, conflict, digitalization, shifting demographics, and other factors. Only 15% of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are on track (UN, 2023). There has been significant research in the field of management scholarship to understand and overcome these societal grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Gümüşay et al., 2022). Given that grand challenges are global (Gümüşay et al., 2022), they must be globally and collaboratively tackled.

To achieve this, it is crucial for management scholarship to reflect on its axiology, ontology, epistemology, and resulting language. Debated terms such as *Global North* and *Global South* or *developing* and *developed* countries increase epistemic barriers in management scholarship, hampering widely inclusive approaches toward understanding, theorizing, and collaboratively shaping more sustainable futures (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022, 2024; Muñoz & Dimov, 2023). An alternative to the inaccurate and value-laden geography-related designations of Global North and Global South (Makoni, 2023; Trisos et al., 2021) was provided by Shahidul Alam (2008) in the 1990s when he introduced the language of *majority worlds* and *minority worlds* – which we adopt here.

In this article, we ask: *how can we decolonize management and organization studies to conduct inclusive global scholarship that enables more impactful research into tackling grand challenges?* We argue that employing decolonial approaches to knowledge production regarding grand challenges has powerful potential. Done carefully, it will both widen the scope of available theory and enable scholars within management to be more inclusive, have a greater impact, and engage in more ethical knowledge production processes across the world. Here, “we” refers to the five authors. We acknowledge the complexity of positionality statements and the danger of fixing authors in particular categories; nonetheless, they serve to delineate the scope and limits of individual and collective expertise (Dixit, 2023; Martin et al., 2022; Savolainen et al., 2023; Trisos et al., 2021). Of the five authors, three were trained in the minority world and work at institutions in Europe. Two are based in the majority world, one having completed her training in the minority world before returning home. The fifth has undertaken all of his intellectual training in South Africa. Collectively, we represent diversity in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, generation, spiritual belief, and socio-economic status.

After reviewing the relevant literature, we parse four approaches toward grand challenges in management scholarship. Those move from (i) *ignorance* (the situation whereby minority world scholars in management studies are usually either ignorant of or actively ignore the reality of the majority of the world); to (ii) *awareness* – the recognition of local perspectives and worldviews and appreciation of local expertise (frequently, however, accompanied by extractive research practices); moving to (iii) *integration*, whereby the majority world is an integrated but unequal partner to theorization undertaken by, in, and for the minority world; and finally (iv) *elevation*, as a fundamental change in power dynamics and scholarly practice that values and fosters local expertise. The fourth approach manifests as a change in existing power dynamics. It holds the potential

to enable management scholars from both the majority and the minority worlds to jointly set agendas in research, teaching, and publication and to more effectively tackle the societal grand challenges of our era.

After explaining these four approaches, we articulate a dynamic perspective that highlights how to enable more inclusive management scholarship to tackle grand challenges. We demonstrate that addressing global challenges in a meaningful way requires what Aboderin and her colleagues call a “fundamental rebalancing [of] positions in the worldwide scientific effort” (2023, p. 2), including management scholarship. We believe the discipline could make practice-based changes that would enable profound shifts toward inclusion and equity, going beyond surface-level diversity efforts and adding richness and depth to available knowledge structures. While these processes are complex, we suggest they are valuable and necessary if we wish to progress as a scholarly field.

## THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

To develop a path toward producing more decolonial and impactful management scholarship, we draw on the literature on grand challenges in management and organization studies.

Serious social, economic, and political concerns remain in our globalized world. Overall, management and organization studies refer to these concerns as grand challenges – the “specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation” (Grand Challenges Canada, 2011, p. iv). Grand challenges are complex, uncertain, and evaluative (Ferraro et al., 2015), requiring coordinated, collaborative, and collective effort that must overcome both systemic and interpersonal barriers. Management scholarship has developed significant research avenues relating to grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Gümüşay et al., 2022), and journals have started steering toward impact-oriented publications aimed at fostering positive change (Chen et al., 2022; Colquitt & George, 2011; Markman et al., 2019). At the same time, some authors have begun to highlight the need for deeper changes in management scholarship (Abdelnour, 2022; Bainazarov et al., 2022; Nkomo, 2011; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008; Zanoni & Mir, 2022) to better comprehend the mechanisms through which grand challenges arise, manifest, and expand, and how they could potentially be overcome. Drawing on these conversations, we distill two main opportunities to support the development of more impactful and decolonial management scholarship: *embracing decolonial perspectives* and *revisiting scholarship practices*.

### *Embracing Decolonial Perspectives*

Recent management and organization studies have called for research that embraces more decolonial perspectives (Banerjee, 2022; Boussebaa, 2023; Bruton et al., 2022) and goes beyond research extraction approaches (Bothello

& Bonfim, 2023; Wickert et al., 2024). These approaches help overcome Western-based theorizing and biases, producing more inclusive management scholarship – instrumental in deepening our understanding of societal grand challenges. For instance, the *Journal of Management Studies* has recently announced a special issue that features decoloniality as a way to recalibrate entrepreneurship research (George et al., 2023). Several sessions on the importance of decoloniality have been scheduled in recent and future management conferences.

Embracing decolonial perspectives also requires more inclusive language. Management studies have employed a number of terminologies to explore organizational phenomena spanning global regions and geographies (developing vs developed countries, Global South vs Global North, emerging vs emerged economies). Nevertheless, these terms do not carefully capture the distinctive local realities. A more inclusive language would help direct attention to global and local cues associated with societal grand challenges (Bansal et al., 2018). Here, we introduce the terms *majority world* and *minority world* into management and organization studies.

Majority world refers to those who live in the majority of the world's territory, influenced by shared conditions of economic precarity and social vulnerability. These conditions are historically based and perpetuated by global systems that do not enable the equal flourishing of humanity. Minority world describes the inhabitants of countries that have high levels of wealth, global political influence, and currency power. These have historically been referred to in management scholarship as “the Global North.” Narratives and theories developed in minority-world contexts often purport to have global relevance and application, although in many cases they do not apply accurately to the majority of the world.

### *Revisiting Scholarship Practices*

Tackling grand challenges requires collaboration across the majority and minority worlds, with careful attention to power dynamics. Often, what is called collaboration on paper is not in fact collaborative, but reflects structures that are often so deeply internalized by all parties that they are not questioned. They reflect a knowledge production system that developed partially by means of land and human resource appropriation, alongside systematic efforts made within the minority world to justify the ideological efforts of colonial powers to diminish indigenous institutions and promote inequalities (Lewis, 1973; Mafeje, 1986, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2012).

Knowledge contestation continues in the contemporary academy. Within its varied spaces, scholars on editorial boards, hiring committees, and evaluation panels may not be fully aware of the cultural and historical specificity of management scholarship as a whole, upholding and reinforcing particular normative expectations in their everyday decision-making processes. These decisions include defining appropriate research questions, theory, language, and style of presentation and are usually (in)formed by the institutionalized training of authors. For example, there is a tendency to privilege knowledge that is written, produced

through measurement, and/or published in minority-world peer-reviewed journals over other kinds of knowledge (Darian-Smith, 2016).

Attending to the boundary-making and exclusionary practices of management scholarship is not meant to point fingers or condemn. Rather, we wish to highlight that this constitution is a matter of choice, and different choices can be made.

As a result of profound shifts in global power dynamics in the 20th century, knowledge structures have progressively been reconstituted – particularly in the minority world (Green, 2021). Critical self-examination on the part of those embedded in knowledge systems has led to several academic generations calling for the decolonization of disciplinary curricula (Nyamjoh, 2019). These movements have been amplified by broader societal and technological changes that have quickly enabled the globalization of discourses. The US-originated #BlackLivesMatter movement is one example; it has been argued that it drew energy from student-led interventions at the University of Cape Town in 2015 under the banner of #RhodesMustFall (Lange, 2019; Mamdani, 1998; Qambela, 2015).

Next, we critically illustrate the growing strength of interventions toward decolonial initiatives within management scholarship in both the majority and minority worlds and provide an overview from exclusive toward more inclusive approaches to tackle grand challenges.

## **FOUR APPROACHES FROM EXCLUSIVE TO INCLUSIVE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE GRAND CHALLENGES**

Grand challenges are global. Scholarly engagement needs to be global, too. To develop impactful solutions, we require research partnerships between the majority and minority world. However, not all types of research partnerships are equally suitable for delivering the insights and solutions needed to tackle grand challenges. Here, we outline four approaches. These approaches emerge as outcomes of our critical reflection on practices gathered from management scholarship in which majority world scholars play increasing roles in shaping and contributing to the fulfillment of research agendas. We consider each approach from the perspectives of scholars in both the minority and the majority world, highlighting that such shifts require a change in the way scholars think and operate globally. The four approaches are illustrated in Fig. 1. In reality, these four approaches are not fixed and may overlap. For simplicity, we present them as abstract, ideal types, reporting their main features and expected impact on grand challenges.

### *Ignorance*

Research partnerships between minority and majority world scholars are still often characterized by *ignorance*. Despite access to globalized news sources, people are shaped by their local realities and the ability to access informed news or scholarship. We understand ignorance as manifesting through the following four

	Ignorance	Awareness	Integration	Elevation
<b>Local expertise</b>	Lack of development of local and historical experts and expertise	Identification of local expertise, frequently accompanied with extractive approaches	Deep incorporation of local expertise	Enhanced local expertise to achieve full attribution, recognition and data control
<b>Perspectives</b>	No or little consideration for alternative perspectives	Recognition of perspectives of “others”, different from “own” knowledge	Inclusive consideration of multiple perspectives throughout the entire research journey	Embeddedness of the entire research journey in multiple perspectives, esp. through epistemic humility
<b>Resource allocation</b>	Lack of commitment in terms of long-term relationships of care and/or investments in infrastructure	Unequal resource allocation	Balanced resource allocation, including long term data ownership	Equitable resource allocation enabled by capacity building of professions
<b>Balance of partnership</b>	No meaningful partnerships	Unequal partnerships	Integrated and balanced partnerships	Decolonized, inclusive partnerships
<b>Research output on grand challenges</b>	Deficient, biased, imposed, and colonized	Deficient and biased	Holistic and inclusive	Holistic, inclusive, and decolonized

*Fig. 1.* Four Approaches Toward More Inclusive Research Partnerships to Tackle Grand Challenges.

characteristics: (1) lack of development of local and historical experts and expertise; (2) no or little consideration for alternative perspectives; (3) lack of commitment to long-term relationships of care and/or investments and infrastructure; (4) lack of meaningful partnerships. In many instances, ignorance – rather than expertise – is the starting point of global research partnerships.

While grand challenges are global, we witness most research on the topic stemming from the minority world, often ignoring local specificities and ground realities elsewhere (Wickert et al., 2024). Ignorance is accompanied by a lack of meaningful local partnerships and very confined research outputs on grand challenges. In part, ignorance is driven by cost-efficiency principles, as meaningful partnerships may require substantial investments of time and financial resources. A lack of partnerships can allow researchers to move faster in the publication process and theorize grand challenges. However, they rarely acknowledge the local challenges faced on the ground.

At present, scholars in the majority world can rarely afford to be equally ignorant of the minority. What happens at the Academy of Management’s annual meeting has an impact beyond the US and Europe, and the conventions and expectations of US/EU academia have largely been uncritically exported. Majority-world scholars are often not aware of the socio-cultural specificities that comprise such institutions. For example, tenure-committee expectations in the US impact the entire management field because they indirectly influence how a large number of well-resourced actors in the field behave. Scholars in other regions then get caught up in these behaviors. Therefore, the socio-cultural specificity of minority-world knowledge structures needs to be better documented and explicitly taught. This shift will enable majority-world individuals to approach management from a perspective of difference rather than inferiority. In turn, this will enable more meaningful and inclusive approaches to tackling grand challenges.

To overcome ignorance, the socio-cultural specificities of both majority- and minority-world knowledge structures need to be better documented, made easily accessible, and taught as part of the management curriculum around the globe. The cultural, social, and economic specificities of majority world contexts (e.g., the famous slogan, “Africa is Not a Country”) need to be reinforced at all stages of the research preparation process (Gümüşay & Amis, 2020). This will provide scholars with greater awareness of their own specificity instead of taking their knowledge practices as an unexamined global norm.

#### *Awareness*

*Awareness* is the second approach along the journey toward inclusive research partnerships in tackling grand challenges. Although still limited, it represents an improvement over ignorance. The main characteristics of awareness in management scholarship are: (1) identification of local expertise; (2) recognition of “others” perspectives different from “own” knowledge; (3) unequal resource allocation; (4) unequal partnerships.

Awareness is an improvement on ignorance as it acknowledges the existence of “others” – local actors and their specific perspectives and worldviews. Nevertheless, it is often still unequal; this cascades into a number of counterproductive consequences that hamper inclusive approaches to research partnerships and the production of meaningful research to tackle grand challenges. For example, awareness is often combined with data appropriation that does not provide those who obtained it with data ownership rights (Ramanathan et al., 2022), or using “others” perspectives to confirm “own” knowledge.

Most theorizing in management scholarship has taken place in the minority world, and when the majority world has been involved as part of research partnerships, it has usually been in the role of data collector or data provider to fit minority-world theorizing (Ramanathan et al., 2022). Research partners are recognized to a greater or lesser extent depending on the particularities of a project, but partners in the majority world are rarely able to shape research questions, co-author arguments, or build theoretical applications that reflect majority world priorities. Scholars in the majority world are often complicit in the unequal extraction of data. Extraction characterizes the majority of contemporary data collection approaches. This results in unequal partnerships and contestation over ownership, control of the narrative, and the right to contest published findings.

It is essential that majority-world scholars prevent these imbalanced partnerships and extractive practices. They should do this by ensuring that data management systems exist in their local contexts and by requiring scholars who wish to collaborate to aspire to do so on equal intellectual terms. This is difficult; in resource-scarce environments, the funds offered by scholars from wealthy institutions in exchange for data are often of significant value. This is particularly true when the data being explored is not a priority in local realities. Despite this, managing collaborations so that they are what Aboderin and colleagues refer to as “transformational” (2023) is fundamental for inclusive, global management scholarship.

### *Integration*

To overcome extractive management scholarship and develop more holistic approaches to tackle grand challenges, researchers in both majority and minority world spaces need to be integrated at all stages of the research process. *Integration* means including all parties in research partnerships by providing fair and equitable rights and obligations according to specific contributions. We have identified the following characteristics of an integrative approach to research partnerships in management scholarship: (1) deep incorporation of local expertise; (2) inclusive consideration of multiple perspectives throughout the entire research journey, including the formulation of research questions, research design, analysis, and publication; (3) balanced resource allocation, including long term data ownership; (4) integrated and balanced partnerships. An integrative approach to management scholarship also entails careful and transparent decisions as to who has what rights to data and the post-project rights to analyze gathered data.

The assertion of scholarly rights and obligations toward research is essential. For scholars based in majority world contexts to feel comfortable asserting such rights and obligations, attention must be given to internalized feelings of inferiority, as described by theorists such as Franz Fanon (1952) and Steve Bantu Biko (1981). When scholars have been educated in parameters that reinforce scarcity, it is often difficult to respond as equals to scholars from minority countries who have seemingly unlimited confidence and resources. This is compounded by weak institutional checks and balances (that often make it difficult for resources to be equitably distributed within localized universities), rigidity in minority world research frameworks (Makoni, 2023), and/or legal structures that may not have the capacity to ethically review all foreign research undertaken in a country. As part of scholarly assertion, scholars in the global majority must build reliable systems of evaluation and control so that no individual has to confront the force of “the West” (or increasingly “the East”) alone. This is essential for enabling inclusive and holistic engagements with grand challenges that are not dominated by minority world perspectives.

### *Elevation*

*Elevation* refers to an approach in which previously marginalized voices find space and amplify themselves within management scholarship. The four main characteristics of elevation are: (1) enhanced local expertise to achieve full attribution, recognition, and data control; (2) embeddedness of the entire research journey in multiple perspectives, especially through epistemic humility – the recognition of the limits to one’s knowledge (which is valuable to *all* scholars); (3) equitable resource allocation enabled by capacity building of professions that carry out translation and storytelling in all relevant contexts; (4) decolonized, inclusive partnerships. Elevation represents the best-suited approach to overcoming ethnocentric management scholarship production and fostering meaningful theoretical approaches to tackle grand challenges inclusively.

Currently, researchers in the majority world are very rarely elevated for their role in international research partnerships. We believe more diverse promotion

criteria are needed so that there are incentives and appraisal for engagement with international partners and societal impact of their scholarship. Recognizing that most human systems place great emphasis on prestige, new prestige markers need to be developed throughout the knowledge production environment. For example, new prestige markers could consider the extent to which positive societal impact and solutions to grand challenges are co-created.

Elevated approaches can be formed to give appropriate recognition to research partnerships that are ethically and equitably undertaken and that contribute to the resolution of grand challenges. New institutional processes need to be developed to support such elevation.

### **MOVING TOWARD INCLUSIVE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE GRAND CHALLENGES: A DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

We presented four approaches toward more inclusivity in research partnerships to foster decolonized approaches in tackling grand challenges in theory and practice. Next, we move from a static description of the four approaches toward a dynamic perspective on how to move from one approach to the next. We begin by describing the transition from *ignorance* to *awareness*, then we move from *awareness* to *integration*, and finally, we highlight best practices to move from *integration* to *elevation*. We provide evidence of these transitions in action using illustrative examples derived from our own experiences as scholars working on three projects fostering partnerships between the majority and minority worlds.

The *Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, and Global Digital Transformation (SET)* research project was implemented by two of us. We had received a research grant from the German Development Cooperation on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development that involved carrying out research and knowledge exchange activities in Benin, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Kosovo, Morocco, Mexico, and Vietnam. The overall goal was to collaborate with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in these countries to build application-oriented expertise, identify best practices, and develop concrete recommendations on issues related to sustainability, entrepreneurship, and digitalization. For instance, in Ghana and Kenya, our activities focused on improving conditions for online gig workers. In Benin, Mexico, Indonesia, and Vietnam, our activities were centered on promoting sustainable entrepreneurship and digital solutions in response to grand challenges such as maintaining biodiversity and mitigating climate change (von Richthofen & Gümüşay, 2023).

The second project, *the TUM SEED Center*, focused on fostering academic exchange around sustainable energy, entrepreneurship, and development; this was in relation to SDG 7, established by the UN General Assembly to tackle the grand challenge of our time related to “access to reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.” Approximately one billion people – or 14% of the world’s population – currently lack access to electricity (International Energy Agency, 2017). While progress in electrification has been made since 2000, hundreds of millions of people

still lack access to affordable energy. To tackle this grand challenge, we require decolonized and collaborative approaches involving actors from both the majority and minority worlds. We illustrate the case of the TUM Sustainable Energies, Entrepreneurship, and Development (SEED) Center, which was established in 2020 as an academic exchange center involving nine partner universities in Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, Peru, and Uganda.

Lastly, we turn to the University of Cape Town and investigate the *Case Writing Centre*, a South African solution to the challenge of global imagination pertaining to Africa. Complex and varied, the African continent presents many challenges for businesses (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020), including infrastructure gaps, debilitated economies, skilled labor gaps, climate change, weak governance, and poor leadership. These challenges create various obstacles for business and stifle the implementation of sustainable development policies (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020). Management studies have made significant advances in contributing to our understanding of how industries and organizations respond to such challenges. However, this research has mostly produced insights from the minority world, with few examples from the majority world (Dang et al., 2020). In 2017, the University of Cape Town (UCT), the Graduate School of Business (GSB), and the Harvard Business School Alumni Africa collaborated to set up a Case Writing Centre at UCT to expose the practical realities and local nuances of doing business in African and emerging markets. This was achieved through the creation of local teaching cases derived from profiling leading businesses and start-ups in Africa.

Drawing on these three projects – the *SET research project*, *TUM SEED Center*, and the *UCT Case Writing Centre* – we provide cross-case examples to illustrate and reflect on current practices in moving toward inclusive research partnerships to tackle grand challenges. The choices made with these three projects reflect our own authorial proclivities and positionalities – something we again embrace and aim to bring to the fore.

### *From Ignorance to Awareness*

The first transition toward inclusive research partnerships to tackle grand challenges involves shifting from ignorance toward increasing awareness of local problems, expertise, and perspectives.

The SET research project embodied this transition in the initial stages of the collaborative endeavors between majority and minority world scholars. Several activities were designed to connect with experts from majority world countries to better understand their experiences and perspectives, including multi-stakeholder dialogues. The minority world research team also attended multiple events to connect with experts and learn about country-level discourses on issues such as AI, gig work, and green technologies. Thanks to these efforts, the minority world scholars became more aware of their own knowledge gaps in particular sectors and the challenges of fieldwork and accurate representation. The team, therefore, decided to allocate the planned study on sustainable digital entrepreneurship to a West African researcher (which relates to the third transition, explained below),

who possessed knowledge of both the entrepreneurship literature and the contextual realities of local entrepreneurs.

The TUM SEED Center tackles the energy grand challenge. Majority-world partners have been included since before the project was funded. The center has enabled the electrification of eight rural villages within eight countries in the majority world, fostered teaching and research exchange activities between the minority and majority world, and has been active in the development of a decolonized research agenda at the intersection of sustainable energies, entrepreneurship, and grand challenges. The TUM SEED Center represents an exemplary case of what appears to be a successful process toward inclusive research partnerships, where actors from both the majority and the minority world collaborate to increase access to affordable and clean energy. Nevertheless, the journey began by moving from ignorance to awareness.

Minority world scholars had established the center to tackle SDG 7 and access to electricity, but it soon became evident that they were ignoring the true challenges on the ground. To build more inclusive scholarship and solutions to grand challenges, minority world scholars had to “unlearn” what they knew about the local challenges and build new awareness. The center has since established multiple forums for public dialogue to raise awareness, which is instrumental in building infrastructure and promoting academic exchange, teaching activities, research projects, and co-authorship. At the beginning of the project, the TUM SEED Center initiated a number of round tables to understand how to better co-develop systems embedded in local realities to enable sustainable energy access in rural villages (where access to electricity was previously not available). In this process, each of the eight partner universities in the majority world took leadership and responsibilities, ran a study of eligible sites, and selected a village that was most suitable for electrification. The rural specificities of each of the selected sites were evaluated by the majority world project leaders and different infrastructure was built according to local needs.

The UCT Case Writing Centre provides further examples of how important it is to move from ignorance to awareness. While grand challenges manifest globally, many of their roots can be found in local realities and need to be understood within their unique local context. Although lessons can be drawn from other parts of the world outside of Africa, there is no guarantee that these lessons will be relevant in addressing local African challenges as the reality in Africa may differ from elsewhere (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2015; Zoogah et al., 2015). This demonstrates the need for research to draw attention to African realities and complexities (George et al., 2016; Hamann et al., 2020). This can be achieved through the development of theoretical or case-based literature from an emerging context, as well as translating insights from this research into the learning environment of universities and business schools. These attempts can result in initiatives to reform the curriculum in business schools and demands for broader changes in their scope and focus. The Case Writing Centre at UCT represents a new platform that allows scholars to become aware of African challenges and best practices by using teaching cases that draw attention to real-life examples. By providing these cases as teaching materials and promoting them as a research strategy, they provide a link between theory and practice centered on local realities.

*From Awareness to Integration*

Moving from ignorance to awareness is the first step in the journey to tackling grand challenges more inclusively. The second step involves moving from awareness toward becoming integrative of local problems, expertise, and perspectives. We illustrate this second transition using examples taken from our three cases.

The SET research project offers concrete examples of moving from awareness to integration in research partnerships to tackle grand challenges. The project involved the organization of two research sprints, one intended to understand and improve the working conditions in Ghana's gig economy, the other to foster entrepreneurial initiatives around the adoption of green technologies in Vietnam. Research sprints bring together a group of interdisciplinary and international researchers to develop actionable knowledge for local policymakers over several weeks or months.

The research sprints enabled the researchers in the minority world to integrate a wider variety of researchers who may go unheard in more traditional research collaborations (e.g., journal article projects), including junior scholars from the majority world. The shorter time frame of the research sprint further provided some predictability about the time allocation for the research; this was essential as researchers in majority world countries such as Ghana and Vietnam may face more challenging working conditions (e.g., time constraints) than researchers in the minority world.

Despite these benefits, the minority world scholars also realized that being in charge of both organizing the sprint and being responsible for the success of the overall project created challenges for equitable participation. Participants from the majority world frequently sought guidance from the organizers on matters ranging from framing the research question to the presentation of the findings. This possibly led to some biases and unintended imposition on the methodology and perspective applied by majority world researchers to illuminate local issues and approaches toward grand challenges. One way to address this issue could entail having an academic institution from the majority world serve as organizer of the sprint, who could then, in turn, involve researchers from the minority world as they see fit (von Richthofen & Gümüşay, 2023). This would also necessitate the institution from the majority world taking charge of where and how money is spent.

Similarly, the TUM SEED Center moved from awareness to integration by providing over 100 mobility grants per year for students, researchers, and practitioners from both the majority and the minority world to enhance integrative academic exchange on diverse topics of interest, such as informal entrepreneurship (Salvi et al., 2023). Each year, an in-person symposium is organized by one of the partner universities to enable community-building, networking, and the development of an integrative research strategy. A delegation of students, project leaders, researchers, and professors from each partner country participates in each symposium. Travel, accommodation, and conference participation are fully funded by the TUM SEED Center. A number of teaching activities are also jointly developed each year by academic staff from the majority and minority world. Students from the majority and minority world are involved in these activities.

Finally, The UCT Case Writing Centre moved from awareness toward integration by developing teaching cases through a collaborative and integrative effort between faculty, researchers, post-graduate students, and business partners to conduct rigorous research on diverse organizations. The unique teaching cases produced in these collaborations represent a form of integrative teaching material for business school classrooms that allows a worldwide audience to engage with the local realities and complexities of African businesses, leadership, and innovation.

### *From Integration to Elevation*

The examples above represent good practices for moving from awareness toward integration. Nevertheless, it is possible to go even further. Below, we provide illustrative examples from our cases to showcase how relevant it is to move from integration to elevation.

As a best practice example of the move from integration to elevation, the SET research project features the commissioning of studies to majority world scholars. In Kenya, the SET project study on the gig economy was conducted by two African researchers, one of whom was based in Nairobi (Kwanya & Wakunuma, 2023). The European team focused on providing infrastructure and support (such as proofreading, design, publication, and knowledge dissemination). The majority world researchers were responsible for both collecting and analyzing the data and remained in charge of data and intellectual property; moreover, they received full credit for their work as sole authors of the study. To move toward even higher degrees of elevation, an alternative approach could be for the studies to be commissioned by scholars in the majority world, who would then involve majority world scholars in the research process.

Finally, we highlight that co-organizing research sprints (see section on the transition from awareness to integration) can sometimes create platforms for building decolonized and true partnerships between majority and minority world researchers, who can jointly engage in the development of more cohesive research to tackle grand challenges. However, several challenges continue to inhibit such collaborations – most notably incentives. From the perspective of minority world scholars, the exercise was time-consuming, and they did not have as much space to focus on writing and publishing academic articles. Academic institutions and hiring committees in the minority world do not give sufficient credit for such endeavors, focusing primarily on the number of publications in top-tier journals. Therefore, our profession needs to change to incentivize similar activities. In some cases, scholars from the majority world will require additional funding, teaching relief, or administrative support for such activities so that they can afford to engage collaboratively in tackling grand challenges with minority world scholars rather than focusing on teaching and other paid activities.

To move from integration to elevation, the TUM SEED Center provided eight long-term research scholarships for PhD students from the majority world. The scholarship holders have the responsibility to jointly develop their research projects

with actors from both the majority and minority world. Workshops are organized to enhance the joint formulation of research questions, the co-development of research designs, and engaged and collaborative approaches to data collection and analysis. Scholars from the majority and minority worlds are also supported in submitting joint articles to international conferences and journals.

The UCT Case Writing Centre moved from integration to elevation as it provided a platform for the joint investment by UCT GSB and Harvard Business School Alumni Africa – an example of a collaborative effort involving actors from both the majority world and the minority world (or as is the case for African Harvard alumni, scholars whose identity is in some way mixed). It is reflective of a somewhat decolonized collaborative approach where actors in the majority world have autonomy and ownership of narratives and means of production. The UCT Case Writing Centre calls for the understanding of African challenges from a localized context, developing elevated solutions that speak to the global discourse. Moreover, this is done in a manner that invites the rest of the world to engage in local phenomena and mechanisms from an African perspective, using African-originating solutions to tackle global challenges.

## **DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES AND PATHWAYS FORWARD**

We have provided illustrative examples from three cases to reflect current practices in moving toward inclusive research partnerships to tackle grand challenges. These examples illustrate some of the changes we believe are needed in scholarship across multiple scales – from the individual scholar, over the field of management, and across the broader structure of global higher education.

Firstly, the TUM SEED Center and SET project are both illustrative of the many instances when researchers in the minority world are shifting the status quo. Though far from perfect, these two projects take very seriously the need to change existing power paradigms in the interests of work that has a high impact outside of the Euro-American academy (and where much of the data is generated). Both projects have engaged majority-world actors throughout the entire research process. Authorship of publication has largely been allocated to those responsible for working with the data, and co-creation of research outputs and practical interventions have been prioritized. In this way, integration and elevation have been fostered within the two projects.

Though largely successful in terms of sustainable partnerships, what has been more challenging is the amount of work that this has required from minority world scholars that is not institutionally recognized as “counting” toward job stability, promotion, and prestige. In these instances, the work itself should not have to change, but rather the organizational structures that determine career recognition and progression. While documents such as the African “Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations” (Association of African Universities, 2023) or the Swiss “Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships” (Swiss Academy of Sciences, 2019) acknowledge the challenges of this work and suggest

steps forward, ensuring these steps are taken remains challenging in practice. An important enabler would be to provide recognition for the elevation of new perspectives, mentorship, teamwork, and co-authorship that transforms the current status quo of individualized academic competition.

UCT's Case Writing Centre is an important African source for information about Africa. We do not suggest that being in or from a place should automatically signify control over dominant narratives, but we *do* recognize that embedded relationships, commitments, and nuanced understanding informed by lived experience are important for adequate depth of work. Unfortunately, current structures often mean that "experts" are recognized less for their relationships with the spaces of data generation than for their location within prestigious departments in the minority world. While publication platforms do matter, these are unlikely to address global challenges in a meaningful way without serious work on assessment metrics, algorithmic bias, and publication credit.

A number of challenges that have surfaced from a colonial approach to management scholarship remain (Trisos et al., 2021). In the following, we briefly note the global and discipline-wide strategic challenges that shape management scholarship, identify stakeholders, and point to potential ways forward. Scholars from diverse geographies and lifeworlds are increasingly connected (Ramanathan et al., 2022), united by algorithms and structures of knowledge that determine digital results, rank business schools, enable journal impact, and determine how expertise is evaluated. Though these algorithms and structures largely originate in the minority world, they impact and significantly shape the boundaries, content, and reach of particular ideas. Given our position as management scholars, we believe that it is important to draw attention to and shift this dynamic at all levels of research projects and academic dialogue.

Meaningful changes in this domain require a rethinking and shifting of how research is conducted (Wickert et al., 2024). These changes have to be made in full consideration of the incentives and deterrents that direct the behavior of scholars in both the minority and majority world (Jansen, 2019). These include financial considerations, gendered responsibilities, promotion requirements, teaching obligations, and attention to relative passport and currency power. On the latter, we note that scholars with passports from minority countries generally have ease of global access supported by strong currencies that enable global travel (Doyle, 2005).

By contrast, scholars from the majority world, even if well-paid and highly respected in their home countries, often cannot travel with ease due to restrictive visa policies and relative currency weakness. This has obvious implications for whose voices are heard and in which form, and for who is able to do research in which country. It is difficult to imagine a group of researchers from Nigeria spending three months in Switzerland doing an analysis of the unique culture of the Swiss banking sector, yet Swiss researchers going to Nigeria to study the informal economy is widely accepted. This is because of the underlying and largely unquestioned structures of power in management scholarship.

Too often, the only way scholars in the majority world can gain legitimacy and visibility to the minority is to have qualifications and/or affiliations with minority-world institutions. Inevitably, this lessens the time and attention they

can provide to engaging with complex challenges at home. In addition, topics like diversity, equity, inclusion, and innovation are dominated by theorizing from the minority world (George et al., 2016), where they are often treated as optional. For many scholars based in majority-world contexts, however, terms such as “diversity” often have very different points of reference, and “innovation” might be a question of daily necessity.

## CONCLUSION

Grand challenges are global, yet management scholarship is currently minority-world dominated. To tackle grand challenges requires adjusting – and decolonizing – our scholarship so that we are able to provide deeper insights and action at a “glocal” level. In this article, we highlighted four approaches, from exclusive to inclusive research partnerships, to tackle grand challenges: ignorance, awareness, integration, and elevation. Through three illustrative cases, we showed that the four approaches are not static but dynamic and presented evidence of how it is possible to develop more holistic, inclusive, and decolonized research outputs on grand challenges.

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