

Editorial: Historical Present. Seeking integrative papers to advance research on management history

Introduction

Before beginning and conducting research, scholars are forced to make choices. They must define the research topic and clarify its boundaries, select a theoretical background and adopt a methodology. All these choices must be made according to the type of paper each scholar wishes to share with their audience. Not surprisingly, there is growing interest in the types of documents scholars can consider and select to be most effective with their research. In the field of management history, integrative papers (based on the analysis and synthesis of primary research findings to provide new insights and summarized knowledge on a specific topic) seem to be undervalued. This editorial examines the actions that underlie the writing of integrative papers, highlights the contribution they can make and encourages management history scholars to consider them for their further research.

The types of papers in the portfolio of management history scholars

This section recalls and reviews the types of papers that management history scholars can choose from. First, it should be noted that the list is not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, it aims only to include the most common types of papers to highlight their strengths and weaknesses. In fact, each type requires a specific approach and serves a specific purpose. Therefore, understanding the differences among the types of papers is crucial to advancing management history research appropriately.

Let us begin with definition papers (Tebeaux, 1980; Lidow, 2022). These provide pure and genuine descriptions of a topic without the authors' personal opinions. Concepts related to the topic are defined, but not analyzed, so that scholars can create a solid foundation for further discussion and analysis and help readers understand the topic. In the field of management history, these documents, also labeled as positioning papers (Barney, 2018, 2020), are used and relevant to narrate a specific historical event, define its key concepts and terms, provide definitions or present implications for further analysis. Management history scholars may also opt for scoping articles (Brown *et al.*, 2019; Manesh *et al.*, 2020; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2023). These are reviews that attempt to provide an initial indication of the potential size and nature of the existing literature on an emerging topic.

Definition papers overlap somewhat with descriptive or narrative papers. In descriptive papers (Speckbacher *et al.*, 2003; Fuertes *et al.*, 2020), scholars offer reviews to help determine the extent to which a body of knowledge about a particular research topic reveals patterns or trends that can be interpreted in relation to preexisting propositions, theories, methodologies or findings. In narrative papers (Valle Santos and García, 2006; Morrell, 2008; Zhang *et al.*, 2023), scholars share reviews to summarize what other scholars write about a particular topic, without seeking generalizations or cumulative knowledge from what is being reviewed. Scholars who submit descriptive or narrative papers do more than definition papers, but they do not go as far. They do not limit their role to recalling events, concepts, terms, definitions or implications, but they do not analyze data, theories and concepts to discover insights and draw new conclusions.



Scholars who want to be more involved in research can opt for review papers. These papers analyze, summarize and synthesize existing research. Review papers can be presented in the form of literature reviews (theoretical) or reports (empirical). Literature reviews (Webster and Watson, 2002; Paul and Criado, 2020) aim to present the evolution and current state-of-the-art of a topic and the scholars who carry them out simply analyze and comment on them to find connections and turning points and to speculate on the results obtained/obtainable. On the other hand, reports do not offer a specific argument or hypothesis, but a comprehensive overview of a particular topic or problem (Bentley, 2002). They include meticulous information and analysis and share clear results.

If they want to be very involved in research, then scholars can also opt for other types of papers. For example, they can propose interpretative papers (Sułkowski, 2009; Matricano, 2024; Matricano and Liguori, 2024). These are based on specific case studies, established theories and reliable data to support specific arguments. These papers examine meanings and implications in depth and offer valuable insights into complex topics through subjective analysis. Alternatively, they can write compare/contrast papers (Komashie *et al.*, 2007; Mills, 2008; Muldoon, 2021). These discuss similarities and differences between two or more topics, concepts, theories, phenomena or cases and aim to critically highlight the relationships and contrasts between the chosen topics. Alternatively, they can write argumentative papers (Werder, 1999; Murungi and Hirschheim, 2022; Poggesi and Mari, 2024) or persuasive papers (El-Shinnawy and Vinze, 1998; Muldoon *et al.*, 2018). They present a clear position on a specific issue and support it with well-reasoned arguments. The purpose is to convince readers to embrace the authors' point of view by providing solid evidence (also depending on the selected cases) and logical reasoning. Unlike other research papers, argumentative papers encourage debate and critical thinking and provide other researchers with ideas for future research.

In another domain, that of empirical data, management history scholars can consider experimental papers (Podsakoff and Podsakoff, 2019). These are designed to investigate and analyze a specific phenomenon, according to a cause-and-effect relationship, and come to conclusions based on empirical evidence. Experiments are conducted to test hypotheses that can explore the mechanisms underlying certain events, demonstrate how one factor influences another, and obtain generalized results. In their place, management history scholars can also work on analytical papers (Hmina and Hniche, 2022). Based on data retrieved from a variety of sources, these papers break down complex phenomena or problems into various components to better understand them. They dig deeper, using critical thinking to analyze the information in depth. As such, these papers are the opposite of descriptive papers. Finally, management history scholars can leverage survey papers (Fawcett *et al.*, 2014). These papers begin with a research question about the attitudes, opinions, behaviors or characteristics of an entire group of people and proceed to collect data through an extensive survey. The collected data are analyzed and presented to reveal gaps in existing research.

An overview of all the types of papers is included in [Table 1](#).

When exploring management history topics, some types of research papers may be missing, leaving gaps in our research and understanding of a topic. For example, if we consider definition and scoping or descriptive and narrative papers, the contribution of management history scholars may not reveal its full potential since they are unable to share all their knowledge and advance the research. In the case of review papers, scholars analyze, summarize and synthesize existing research (including historical research) and thus their contribution increases. In interpretative, compare/contrast and argumentative or persuasive papers, management history scholars rework, validate and endorse theories and concepts. In

Table 1. An overview of the types of papers available to management history scholars

Type of paper	Contribution/limitation
Definition papers (positioning papers)	They offer descriptions of a topic without personal opinions. Concepts are defined, but not analyzed, to create a solid foundation and help readers understand the topic
Scoping articles	They attempt to provide an initial indication of the potential size and nature of the existing literature on an emerging topic
Descriptive papers	They interpret a particular research topic relation to preexisting propositions, theories, methodologies or findings
Narrative papers	They try to summarize what the state-of-the-art of a particular topic, without seeking generalizations or cumulative knowledge
Review papers/literature reviews	They analyze, summarize and synthesize research. Literature reviews present the evolution and current state-of-the-art of a topic and reveal connections and turning points and to speculate on the results obtained/obtainable
Review papers/reports	They analyze, summarize and synthesize research. Reports do not include arguments/hypothesis, but meticulous analysis to share clear results
Interpretative papers	Based on specific case studies, established theories and reliable data to support specific arguments, they examine meanings and implications in depth and offer valuable insights into complex topics through subjective analysis
Compare/contrast papers	They compare similarities and differences among topics, concepts, theories, phenomena or cases and aim to critically highlight the relationships and contrasts between the chosen topics
Argumentative/persuasive papers	They aim to convince readers to embrace the authors' point of view by providing solid evidence and logical reasoning. These papers encourage debate and critical thinking and stimulate ideas for future research
Experimental papers	According to a cause-and-effect relationship, they are conducted to test hypotheses that can explore the mechanisms underlying events, demonstrate how one factor influences another and get generalized results
Analytical papers	These papers break down complex phenomena or problems into various components to better understand them. They dig deeper, using critical thinking to analyze the information in depth
Survey papers	They are based on a research question about the attitudes, opinions, behaviors or characteristics of an entire group of people and proceed to collect data through an extensive survey to reveal gaps in existing research

Source: Authors' personal elaboration

this case, the contribution of management history scholars becomes more manifest. Finally, in empirical papers, the contribution of management history scholars may be partial since the results of empirical tests are the basis of comments and speculations and the reference to historical phenomena and theories is intermediate through data.

Although the contribution of management history scholars is significant in review papers on the one hand, and in interpretative, compare/contrast and argumentative or persuasive papers on the other, there is a clear limitation that needs to be highlighted. This is in the perspective adopted. In most cases, this is retrospective. Management history scholars refer to past theories, events or phenomena and they are embedded in the past. It is rare to find management history scholars who analyze management contemporary events occurring at

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the macro, meso and micro levels according to theories, concepts or notions rooted in the past or, on the contrary, start from real events or phenomena to reinterpret existing theories, concepts or notions and give them new life (Cho, 2022). In other words, it is rare to read integrative papers.

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The writing of integrative papers and their contribution

Let us start with the definition of integrative papers. Unlike the types of papers cited above, integrative papers are based on primary research studies and other documents (including opinions, discussion papers and policy documents), which are not included in a standard literature review. Therefore, scholars can go beyond an analysis and synthesis of primary research findings and can provide new insights and summarized knowledge about a specific topic (Doolen, 2017; Rowley and Slack, 2004; Sauer and Seuring, 2023).

The main strength of integrative papers concerns a broader understanding of specific events or phenomena. In fact, the approach underlying integrative papers provides scholars with new insights and summarized knowledge, offering the potential to generate theory and classify constructs (Weinstein *et al.*, 2013; Soares *et al.*, 2014; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020). Although some scholars criticize integrative articles (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020), it is important to clarify how scholars can write them (Souza *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding the methodological approach and design of integrative articles, several scholars advance proposals, each characterized by specific phases and different nomenclatures. For example, Whittemore and Knafl (2005) highlight five steps that include problem identification (Phase 1), literature search (Phase 2), data evaluation (Phase 3), data analysis (Phase 4) and data presentation (Phase 5). Despite the same number of phases, Torracco (2005, 2016) and Russell (2005) frame the phases differently. The sequence includes problem formulation (Phase 1), data collection (Phase 2), data evaluation (Phase 3), data analysis (Phase 4) and interpretation and presentation of results (Phase 5).

To overcome some actual discrepancies and some formal differences that ultimately do not appear to be substantial (Jackson, 1980; Hopia *et al.*, 2016), the following is a sequence of actions useful for ensuring the essential rigor of scientific research when carrying out integrative work.

Action 1. Synthesis of prior knowledge. During this phase, scholars combine insights from various sources, studies or theories to create a coherent understanding of an event, phenomenon or topic. This synthesis identifies patterns, trends and gaps in the existing literature. Of course, performing Action 1 is not easy. Evidence collection must be complete and sensitive to enhance the credibility of the review and reduce potential bias. For this reason, special attention must be paid to the search, screening and selection of prior knowledge. To do this carefully, scholars must define the rationale for inclusion and exclusion criteria in advance. Criteria such as validity, completeness, efficiency and relevance of the studies for the review must be considered during the screening and selection process (Smith, 2011).

Action 2. Critical analysis. Scholars evaluate and compare different perspectives, methodologies, and results to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the current body of knowledge. At the basis of critical analysis in integrative documents, not a single instrument, tool or criterion can be applied, but a variety of them, so their reliability and validity must be carefully assessed.

Action 3. Contribute to the field. Scholars integrate diverse viewpoints and research findings to propose new hypotheses or frameworks, contributing original insights to the field. Scholars who write integrative articles contemplate the strength of findings in terms of clear

evidence, investigate the consistency of effects within papers and identify inconsistent findings and provide robust conclusions.

Action 4. Enhanced understanding. Scholars provide readers with a comprehensive overview of an event, phenomenon or topic, making complex information more accessible and understandable. Integrative papers should include a combination of relevant concepts, thoughts, definitions or other information derived from the documents consulted about the investigated event, phenomenon or topic.

Action 5. Foundation for further research. Concluding remarks from an integrative paper can serve as a springboard for future research, suggesting new areas of investigation or practical applications.

Overall, integrative articles are valuable tools to advance knowledge and promote deeper understanding within the academic and professional communities. For scholars who are not accustomed to integrative articles, the methodological approach and design behind these articles:

- Relies on theories, concepts or notions rooted in the past to not only frame management events occurring at the macro, meso and micro levels, but also to analyze these events and their dynamics.
- Provides a clear synthesis of knowledge and applicability of the findings of previous theories to current events and their dynamics.
- Reaches comprehensive and reliable conclusions.

The main contribution of integrative papers is to allow scholars to share their personal views, opinions and thoughts on a specific event, phenomenon or topic. Due to the above-mentioned characteristics, integrative papers can be very useful in the field of management history to make a significant contribution to a particular body of knowledge and, in turn, to practice and research. Of course, only if scholars use meticulous and timely work and maintain their scientific integrity when working on these articles, the results will be robust, validated and appreciated.

A call for future submissions to journal of management history

Switching from one type of paper to another is a challenge for scholars who learn a specific methodological approach and design, get used to it, and try to improve it paper after paper. It would seem, therefore, that there is not so much room for integrative papers. However, if management scholars could question about the relevance of history in the field of management, the result could be different (Lubbe *et al.*, 2020).

Let us just think about what practitioners, experts and analysts expect from management history scholars. On the one hand, practitioners observe that time passes quickly, scenarios change radically, and individual choices and behaviors are always new and difficult to explain unless they are interpreted according to contemporary perspectives. Consequently, the relevance of the past is questioned. On the other hand, experts and analysts, who comment on phenomena and events *ex post*, are used to recalling theories, concepts and notions of the past to carry out exhaustive analyses and make authoritative judgments. In this case, the relevance of the past is confirmed and reinforced time after time.

Management history scholars are exactly in the middle. On the one hand, they are interested in capturing current phenomena and are therefore inclined to share the practitioners' view. On the other hand, they are aware of the relevance of the past and are therefore likely to share the analysts' view.

Through integrative papers these views can be reconciled. Indeed, just as in the fields of linguistics and rhetoric, where the historical present is the use of the present tense rather than the past tenses to narrate relevant and timeless events as if they were still unfolding, this ongoing series of articles seeks contributions that analyze new and current managerial phenomena in the light of historical theories, concepts and notions. The ongoing series of papers, launched by *Journal of Management History* and named “Historical Present”, is the perfect home for these papers. “Historical Present” seeks contributions (both qualitative and quantitative) that begin by recalling theories, concepts or notions rooted in the past and analyze management events occurring at the macro, meso and micro levels from one or more selected perspectives. At the same time, this ongoing series of papers seeks contribution that starts from past events or phenomena and reinterpret existing theories, concepts or notions, giving them new life.

As difficult as it may seem to write integrative papers, the task can be completed without a hitch (Macieira *et al.*, 2020; Greimel *et al.*, 2023; McGuire *et al.*, 2023). Management scholars are immersed in theories, concepts or notions of the past, so they are equipped to analyze the current state-of-the-art and face the challenge of authoring integrative papers.

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