Guest editorial

Proliferation and propagation of breakthrough performance management theories and praxes

Introduction

Major theories on, and empirical research into, performance management related issues have proliferated in the past recent decades. These have covered a broad range of disciplinary areas – some of which are at their point of inception and some by borrowing and transferring to the neighboring discipline. A special issue of the *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management* (*IJPPM*), published about a decade ago, took stock of the extent of this multidisciplinarity, but recognized "a number of barriers to effective knowledge transfer […] together with some gaps in the scope of research methods and theory-building" (Holloway, 2009, p. 398). For example, "although formal opportunities can arise to sell the contribution of performance management research, based in business schools, to potential clients in public and commercial organisations, many more informal opportunities arise through contacts with students, their employers, our friends and acquaintances […][but] we all need a genuine shared language to surface assumptions and raise awareness of research in other disciplines that are interdependent of our own" (Holloway, 2009, p. 399).

A decade on, it is time for a new special issue of the *IJPPM* to revisit these concluding lines and go further to examine how/if these theories/research have impacted practices for the range of stakeholders, and also in neighboring disciplines. The articles included in this special issue look broadly at the proliferation (widespread) and propagation (deliberate attempt to implant in other disciplines/contexts) of breakthrough (significant, high impact, renowned) performance management theories and praxes (cf. practices, for its acceptability and custom use). In other words, performance management research has now surpassed multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, but not necessarily for the better, and its usefulness may be overstated, contrived or deemed quackery, in the discipline or context of application. Now, some decades on since "performance management" as a common language phrase has become prominent, readers may decide after considering these articles if this view still stands or can be falsified.

Led by the performance management special interest group of the British Academy of Management (a leading authority on the general academic field of management and vital community for scholars and international peers to meet and advance theory and discern practice of over 30 years), the special issue has tendered its interest openly and in particular across a number of its sister academies whose research focus has also been in productivity and performance management. For example, the performance management association, also incepted two decades ago, which has an established bi-annual meeting place that networks cross-disciplinary academics and practitioners to advance knowledge and insight and exchange ideas for rapid exchange and the World Confederation of Productivity Science which has existed since 1968 with a global network which aims to explore productivity and performance management as a mechanism for creating wealth and quality of life. Incidentally, contributions have been received from scholars of these and other academies from all over the globe across which interest and research into the subject area has proliferated. These include the UK, wider Europe, India and China, suggesting broad extendibility of the field of performance management, and not just from the USA where most of their theories and frameworks originated or were incepted.

Overview of the contributions

The eight contributions chosen for inclusion in this special issue individually examine an aspect of a performance management breakthrough theory or praxis, and together sequentially present how productivity and performance management relate. They cover the forms of systematic reviews, conceptual propositions, empirical investigations and reflective practice.

The first article by Ruales Guzman *et al.* provides a systematic literature review of quality management in relation to productivity. This review is meaningful, as quality management has long been researched or presented as core to productivity due to quality being defined as a level ultimately required by the customer. The various theories relating to quality management go back to the pioneering Japanese principles of Crosby (1979) and practitioners involved in auto manufacturing (e.g. Feigenbaum, 1951) of over half a century ago. The article finds that productivity is now better represented by other variables not considered within the early quality movement, such as human resources, top management and process management. The authors argue, these go beyond manufacturing (and productivity) and relate more closely to performance management, which is broader. This identification is important as the present journal has grown to be more comprehensive in this way, against which the topics within its scope have also proliferated over the years.

The second article, by Couturier and Sklavounos, focuses on the performance management aspect to examine specifically the meaning of the now commonly used expression, performance management system (PMS). It begins with a review of the extant literature in the PMS area and then narrows down to an emerging area, identified as "dialogue." Based on Mengis and Eppler's (2008) framework for conversation management from the knowledge management perspective, the authors present a framework that enhances the effectiveness of PMSs as the growing importance of communication assists in coordinating the prerequisites known to be important within a PMS, both theoretically and usefully in practice. Hence, this article has demonstrated two key contributions – first, the proliferation of the performance dimension to the knowledge management domain as well as its proliferation to the communication literature; and second, the beneficial interdisciplinary integration for the performance management and communications literature.

Armstrong's article which follows takes the specific aspect of strategy mapping, which originated in the 1990s and earlier, but popularized by Kaplan and Norton's (2000) seminal work, and revisits it using a realist synthesis. While the idea of balancing different perspectives of an organization to augment the financial one to gain a comprehensive understanding of a company's performance status and then to map out the cause and effect variables dates back a couple of decades and is popular in usage (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2015), the article argues that strategy maps are still underused and has greater potential than its current usage. Arguing also the under-utility of the realist synthesis in employing systematic literature reviews, practice may be suffering from a potential mismatch of the way strategy maps fit specifically within performance management. Hence, organizational effectiveness, perhaps through better alignment or other approaches, sits at the focal point for the future of performance management research.

The next article, by Shet *et al.* does just that by looking explicitly at organizational effectiveness in the form of superior performance for the firm. Based on the leadership competency model (LCM) which has emerged more recently in the people-based literature, the authors trace the need to appraise the workforce in a futuristic manner to the early work of McGregor (1957) with the origins dating back to the once dominating and breakthrough Taylorist perspectives of over a century ago. Following on from the need to maximize the potential of PMSs from a human, rather than machine-based humanistic, perspective, this article examines contributions in this area through competency-based techniques.

In so doing, the authors examine the in-depth meaning of competencies and contribute by developing a new scale for measuring competencies. They argue that few empirical studies have integrated LCM with other human resource processes. From the empirical results of their structural equation modeling analysis, then they argue that performance management initiatives can be accelerated by building better performance cultures within the organization.

The fifth contribution in this special issue, by Kumar and Thakur, follows on from the view of the need to develop performance measures and evaluates the use of methods to determine performance success. Thus, the well-known technique of data envelopment analysis for efficiency and ranking is critiqued and applied to the increasingly important context of higher education institutions. Tracing such an approach back to Cameron (1978), the authors utilize a more emerging technique known as dynamic data envelopment analysis to meet the needs of ranking which is now favoured and considered of greater use in the international league tables. The method factors in different societal, economic and political contexts to evaluate efficiency, providing more meaning evaluations to a broader range of stakeholders interested in the rankings.

The next article, by Garg, also considers the efficiency of organizations, from a well-known cognitive work theory, known as high-performance work practices (HPWP) from around the 1990s (e.g. Huselid, 1995) although their origins may have been earlier under different guises. Recognizing a number of empirical researches have taken place that considered the impact of HPWPs on organizational performance, missing is the mediating role of explanatory theories. The article therefore tests job satisfaction and organization citizenship behavior, which come from psychological impact theory, as mediators of HPWP and firm performance and finds partial mediation effects on the relationship. In this way, the performance dimension of a firm not only has moved on to consider human practices, but even further and deeper, to the cognitive and psychological aspects that support that underlying performance.

In a similar vein, the next article by Shen examines the cognitive underpinning of human performance through the leader-member exchange relationship between supervisor and subordinates. In this study, Shen reveals the influence of organizational identification on organizational citizenship behavior and the moderating effects of turnover intention. Based on social exchange theory, famous in the 1960s (Blau, 1964), Shen finds the quality of relationships within a firm is important, due to the positive moderating effects found present between the superior and subordinate, and can improve overall firm performance and individual satisfaction. Overall, she argues that organizations should strive to improve a subordinate's organizational identification to encourage extra-role behaviors. This research was limited in that the quantitative study does not define or provide a richer context of the circumstances in which the "quality" of the relationship of employees in the firm is understood.

Hence, the last article by Bui *et al.* fills this gap by providing a reflective practice perspective on the relationship between employees and employer, to understand the cognitive emotions and feelings of employees who escape redundancy during major organizational downsizing. The article augments scenario planning methodology, a well-known technique first used in the 1960s (Wack, 1985), with those specific emotions known in the human resource management literature as the survivor syndrome (Brockner *et al.*, 1986) to show they benefit one-another. Taking the 2008 global financial crisis (see Chau *et al.*, 2012) as an extreme context of major economic turbulence in which redundancies were most likely, the article drew on the feelings of survivors who were interviewed to understand their feelings better. The authors find the feelings could be grouped within seven themes, and argue they should be used within scenario planning methodology to create more accurate scenarios as no other kind of research participant can

assist to craft hypothetical situations (scenarios) more accurately than those who almost befallen them. This is a praxis of performance management that can be improved by first improving the theory on which it is based.

Implications and future directions

The articles in this special issue have presented a sequential exploration of theories that relate to one-another and are combined in novel and valuable ways that have extended our existing knowledge about productivity and performance management. From these, and following up on the early queries raised by Holloway (2009), we are now able to throw some light on three fundamental questions:

(1) Is performance management still engaged in the multidisciplinarity/interdisciplinarity usefulness debate? Yes, but perhaps not intentionally. The contributions have shown that new constructs that have not previously been considered, but which they have had their place in neighboring disciplines, play a role in the performance management relationship researched. They are not questioned as to whether or not research should engage with other specific chosen disciplines, but rather that the research has involved and cut across the realms of other disciplines which have subsequently been identified.

(2) Is there a shared language that has emerged from across the disciplines to which performance management relates that is understandable to a wider audience of stakeholders? Perhaps yes. As a broader group of scholars from other disciplines, practitioners from a range of industries and sectors who find use in performance management, and policy makers and beneficiaries of research have become more engaged in performance management research as research subjects or make use of its findings, a common language of terms relating to performance management improvement has emerged. Common terms, like high performance, organizational effectiveness, efficiency, superior performance, strategy alignment and communication, leadership and cognition, and methodological phrases like moderating/mediating effects, dynamic analysis and systematic review, have come into frequent use.

(3) Has research in performance management breakthrough theories proliferated and/or propagated appropriately within their associated praxes? Definitely so. In the way performance management research has involved broad and new, intervening and related variables, there is evidence of pushing out the frontiers in the field by allowing neighboring disciplines to learn from its mainstream and established conceptions. The consideration of a theory being breakthrough or not is one that has made significant impact at the time and then stood a further test of time in terms of its validity and resilience against new and emerging ideas. However, breakthrough ideas *vis-à-vis* steady ones, or step and momentum changes, to borrow suitable terms from the established field (Lorange *et al.*, 1986), are but part and parcel of the same thing. Old and dated ideas become augmented with new (breakthrough) ideas, which in turn become established/dated and get augmented with even newer ideas. These are then tested/applied to nascent contexts in the form of their associated praxes.

So where does this leave us for the future, and for an *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*? The contributions in this special issue have indeed offered broad coverage and extensive scope of the theme of breakthrough theories, as dictated by a changing society and business, but this is just the start of a life-long journey of evolvement in performance management research and praxis. Immediate future research might like to follow up on how truly different new ideas in the field are from their established

breakthrough ones that are claimed to be augmenting. But for the longer term, we expect new breakthrough theories and associated praxes to proliferate, and we look forward to the pleasure of your company in joining us in that journey.

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