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Research Companion to Green International Management Studies

A Guide for Future Research, Collaboration and Review Writing

Edited by **Deborah E. de Lange**

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Sincerely,
Debbie de Lange, PhD

Preface

Deborah E. de Lange

This set of reviews is the intended result of a Professional Development Workshop (PDW) held at the Academy of Management 2009 conference in Chicago, entitled, 'Future Research Paths for Green International Management Studies'. I organized the participants into four groups, representing areas of interest related to sustainability: Corporate Social Responsibility; NGOs, IGOs, Government and Sustainability in Developing Nations; Environmental Innovation and Talent; and Academic Theory. The first three subfields are phenomena-centered and the fourth group ties the broader field of sustainability together from a theoretical perspective. The latter group's purpose was to summarize the theories it found prevalent in the sustainability literature and make suggestions regarding which theory(ies) may be most promising for future sustainability research.

Prior to the conference meeting, participants who volunteered to be involved, based on their interests, chose for review three high-quality academic journal articles related to one of the subfields. The reviews were completed before the meeting so that all participants could read all the reviews. At the PDW meeting, the groups discussed what they found in common based on their reviews so that they could make summary recommendations as to where future research in their subfield should go. They were to first examine the current state of the literature, next, to find gaps in it, and following this, make future research recommendations. The overviews at the beginning of each section of reviews in this book were written after these discussions to capture them. They present some main ideas for area guidance.

The set-up of this PDW is instructive for other areas; the same framework and set-up, organizing many people to research the current state of a field may be replicated; other areas will need the same review and consolidated direction for future research. It's also a way for those who are interested in an area to bring themselves up to speed very quickly in a field; no previous knowledge is required, just a willingness to contribute some reviews. However, most of the participants in this PDW were dedicated experts. Another advantage is that this approach promotes an emerging field, precisely by getting a wide range of people together – from those who are already experts to those who are interested.

Why read the result of this group's work? While admittedly not covering everything, it is a large compendium summarizing and reviewing many excellent articles in the field. Broad themes are outlined, suggesting opportunities for future research and the critiques by the participant authors provide valuable insights. They also refer to other articles not reviewed, integrating literature that someone reading the reviews can refer to for further reading. It's a wonderful springboard for researchers who are searching for inspiration and a quick way to help decide which articles to read. Many of the participants are focused researchers in this area and have already conveniently narrowed down the choices. Also interesting to note is that the reviews combine the views of a very diverse international group of scholars. Additionally, it makes excellent PhD-level course material. Whether it's for a course in sustainability, a related area, or a demonstration of how to critique articles, scholars will find this helpful in guiding their students. Mentors may ask their PhD students to review articles listed in the book and then reflect on what the authors in this book have to say as a comparison and point of discussion – excellent review practice.

Also, practitioners who intend to be leaders in their field will refer to this book. Rather than struggling to read many academic articles without the requisite training, they can learn about the latest ideas and learn about the debates. Consultants may read it and be thought leaders, sharing the ideas with their client managers. Corporate leaders and top managers in firms who want to obtain the big strategic picture will also gain insight; a competitive advantage is gained when the firm is set on the right track.

Each subfield offers some interesting themes and research opportunities to ponder, currently existing in the research and for future work. The Corporate Social Responsibility group (CSR), facilitated by Oana Branzei and Patricia Vidal, tells us that there are four main themes it can use to identify gaps; it is a holistic approach to explaining how the field may move forward. It suggests that researchers may address gaps by experimenting with other theories and approaches such as institutional theory and the use of narratives. Qualitative research is a popular suggestion amongst the researcher participants, in general. Searching for ways to make CSR, as a substantive and not ceremonial change, part of the manager's normal repertoire is a practical concern; the researchers' direction reflects grounded views – they want to discover how we can align interests so as to make real change. Perhaps, refining CSR concepts so as to develop a common language that all parties can understand may help them to communicate clearly and align interests.

The main purpose of the subfield, NGOs, IGOs, Government and Sustainability in Developing Nations, is to examine how various international actors and governments influence and promote sustainable practices by firms in developing nations. The group, facilitated by me, discussed the problem and opportunity of this being a multidisciplinary field including, but not limited to: political science, development, sustainability, strategy and organizations fields. This presents challenges for integration when, for example, definitions, such as that for sustainability, are not uniformly agreed upon. Also, dominant theories used in sustainability are the resource-based view and stakeholder theory, but given the level of analysis – international and related organizations – the researcher participants see an opportunity for testing and application of other theories such as institutional theory, as did the first group. Moreover, research has found it convenient to study the Triad nations whereas developing nations have not received much attention. Thus, this is an area ripe for future research.

The title of the third subfield, Environmental Innovation and Talent, is meant to group research relating to firms that adopt and develop environmental innovation; this must include the challenge of finding talented human resources to work on environmental innovation. The subfield group, facilitated by Claire Simmers, discovered many questions to ask and, as an example, wonders what drives firms to adopt environmental innovations. In addition to questions about firms and how they may attract/develop employees, the group recognized the environment – stakeholders – as an important influence on firm innovation. Theory development at the firm level is scarce and the group has identified a currently economic orientation to explanations for innovation in firms. Also, similar to the other subfields, definitions and measurement of seemingly the most basic of constructs – even environmental innovation – are deterring the field's inquiry. At the human resource level, more work has been undertaken, using leadership and core competence theories.

Finally, the mandate of the Academic Theory group, facilitated by Dan Caprar, was to examine all papers reviewed in order to prompt discussion about which theories are being used in the sustainability literature and to think about which theories make most sense to use in research going forward. Also, the area of sustainability may be one that is opportune for testing some theories more so than others. This is a big task and the expectation was that it would start a valuable discussion rather than come to solid conclusions. As we know, the field of organizational theory, the area from which most theories in use are derived, is multi-theoretical and while it has discussions about which theory should be of focus, no lasting conclusions have been or are expected to be reached. This group finds that most organizational theories are being used in sustainability studies; for example, a dominant theory is the resource-based view at the firm level, as was found by other groups. The group debated whether a new theory for the field is needed and did not come to a clear conclusion. However, it valued the contradictions in sustainability theorizing as opportunities, not barriers.

The participants did a tremendous amount of work and had lively discussions to reach a higher understanding of and to make recommendations for useful future research in an exciting emerging field that is critical at this time in the world's history and will be for generations to come; we have to make permanent behavioral changes and our organizations – whether firms, governments, or international organizations – are places of great influence. I believe that all my colleagues in this endeavor will agree that change is a main motivation for coming together to examine this academic field that has such great potential to make an impact on a world clearly in trouble and in need of solutions – today.

Contents

1 Writing a professional academic article review

Deborah E. de Lange

A professional review is different from those we learn to do at earlier stages of our academic training. Early on, PhDs are learning how to wade through the complications of the research. Most PhD programs train academics to critique articles in the area in which they are building their expertise. The approach may be more or less structured and is often unwritten and practiced in PhD seminars through discussion. The approaches are similar because they are ultimately teaching students not only to become good reviewers, but also to know what the ingredients and structure of the quality research articles are that they will be expected to produce. So, while they usually informally discuss and may write rough note critiques, the reviews are almost never written for an audience in a professional manner. Book reviews are usually found in academic journals and they are the best available examples of what a professional review looks like, but books are different from articles.

So, when I asked the contributors to this compendium to produce reviews, I asked them to include the components of a research article critique and gave them example book reviews to suggest that they write their journal article reviews to be interesting to an audience based on the style of the book reviews. After all, they would all need to read each others' reviews in order to review a great deal of literature in a short period of time and come to consensus about where the field is, what research gaps exist and to make recommendations for future research. Good article reviews were critical for this corroborative task.

This research companion contains professional-style critiques of journal articles, rather than books, because it is journal articles that tend to be the basis for the field of management. However, many important and seminal contributions have been made in book form, usually from fields such as sociology, social psychology and political science that are making crossover contributions to the field of management. A core academic expertise is critical review of journal articles. Reviews are published here to support the contributors' consensus regarding where the green international management field should go, to provide a quicker review of the available literature chosen by scholars in the field and to codify instructional material regarding critical review. In general, the review work of PhDs and journal reviewers is very much lost because no examples are published; how to review well becomes tacit rather than codified knowledge only because no one has thought to publish example reviews. Thus, this research companion is a guide for researchers and is also a source to improve the quality and consistency of PhD education. Moreover, it takes this a step further by demonstrating professional quality review writing.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF AN ARTICLE

Prior to writing a professional review, the article must be well understood within its parts and as a whole. Thus, I will discuss what one should be looking for in each section of a standard journal article and how it should be cohesive. Standard empirical article sections include, in order: an abstract, introduction, theory, methods, results and conclusions. Other types of articles that may be qualitative and pure theory will have slightly different expected contents and formats, but many of the principles discussed for the empirical article apply. A theory article will not have methods and results sections and the theory section will be much more thorough, not only including existing theory, but also developing additional new theory more than would be found in an empirical article that would either test existing theory or extend theory, but not as expansively. The purpose of a qualitative article may be, for example, to develop theory by using a grounded approach; the theory may actually develop out of the methods and results, a different order (Singleton and Straits, 1988). Any related existing theory would be discussed in advance.

The abstract is often ignored in PhD seminars, but reviewers consider it critical in forming their impression as to whether they will have a positive reaction to the article or not. It may be a case of first impressions, but if the abstract does not do what's expected, a reviewer will wonder how much worse the article is going to be given that an abstract is relatively easy to write. Also, clarity in the abstract is an initial indication of the quality and clarity of thought in the paper. The abstract should be written last, after the paper is finished and tells the reader what the paper intends to do, how it does it and what the results are within a limited word length, usually 100–300 words. An author may use catchphrases to grab the reader's attention so that he or she will read on.

The introduction section can be written using different approaches, but has some main ingredients. A choice of style can be made in the beginning. For example, it may start by introducing the theoretical stream of the paper to emphasize its intention to engage in theory building. It may begin with an interesting anecdote to capture the imagination of the reader, put the paper into a context of general or recent interest, or provide a real world analogy so that when the paper becomes abstract, the reader can keep a familiar analogy in mind. Another possibility is to begin with a recent issue or event of importance, like the financial crisis, and link the question of the paper to this important issue or event. The paper could also begin by discussing the context in which it intends to test hypotheses. Particular industry or international issues could be a way to introduce the testing context when it is an important element of the paper. However, sometimes the intent to test theory is so much the focus that the empirical context is irrelevant except as it makes the theory more or less generalizable or influences data accessibility or limitations. In a case like this, the context should not be discussed so early because it gives it too much emphasis. Most importantly, this part of the introduction should somehow grab the interest of the academic group to which it is aimed.

An important element of the introduction is the research question with some explanation of why it's being investigated and why it is important to do so. It's usually investigated because there is a theoretical gap in the literature that has some value in addressing for theory building. Another reason to ask a particular question in an empirical paper is because although the theory has been written, it needs testing and if it's been tested, perhaps there is a better methodological approach or it needs to be tested in a more or another generalizable setting. The introduction does not include a thorough explanation of the theoretical gap because that often entails an in-depth review of past research. In some research streams, phenomena are investigated rather than testing theory. This happens frequently in the international business literature, for example, and it is criticized for having this emphasis.

Additionally, the introduction usually indicates the level or units of analysis of the study such as the individual, firm or organization, industry or population, and community levels, where a community is a set of populations (Carroll, 1984). Sometimes, papers study at more than one level of analysis, but the main issue is to keep attributions consistent. An ecological fallacy occurs when the levels or units of analysis are mixed such that the relationships between properties of groups or geographical areas are used to make inferences about the individual behaviors of the people within those groups or areas (Singleton and Straits, 1988).

The theory section may not be titled as such, but it should have a descriptive title to suggest that some background theory will be discussed. Several sections may be required in case the paper draws from several theoretical traditions. It is in this section that past work is reviewed, mentioning its important contributions, showing how different papers differ in their views, approaches and results. Most importantly, this section should emphasize how the previous literature relates to the current research question and where there is a gap in the current work that is useful to address. It is in this section that the detailed explanation, introduced in the first section, is fleshed out. The theory section is usually written in a matter-of-fact tone; although it is a critique of what has been done, it's usually not an emotional or purposely biased argument.

Next, the author extends theory and either includes propositions if it is a theory paper or hypotheses if it is an empirical paper. The propositions are detailed falsifiable statements that in combination serve to answer the research question (Popper, 1963). If it is an empirical paper this part may simply entail explanations of how the author is arriving at detailed testable and operationalizable hypotheses. However, an empirical paper may also extend theory and the explanations leading to the hypotheses would include this. After each explanation, a proposition or hypothesis should be written. A hypothesis is a more specific version of a falsifiable proposition. An empirical paper uses data that enables the construction of variables; hypotheses will describe the exact relationships, whether correlational or causational, between variables of interest or interactions among them and a dependent variable that is an outcome variable.

If it is an empirical paper it continues with a methods section. Now that the reader is thoroughly convinced of the value of addressing the research question and understands the logic behind testing the hypotheses, what they are and how they link to the research question, there is this technical section that describes the details of the testing. The methods section first describes the data and variables; however, sometimes these are distinct sections prior to the methods section – they may be separated. A description of the data includes names of the data sources, what fields of important information are in the sources, whether there is missing data and how it is dealt with and how the data is coded. For example, an answer to a question may be binary coded yes = 1 and no = 0. The variables are constructed from the data and will usually be given short descriptive names that are also indicative of how they are coded. For example, rather than calling a binary variable that indicates gender, 'gender', it would be called 'female' if female = 1 and male = 0. Sometimes, variables are created through complicated mathematical operations and this should be described in detail. Why is this important? Measurement problems exist when variables, as constructed, do not measure what they are described to measure, the constructs, as laid out in the earlier theory and hypotheses section. Reviewers are careful to examine this issue. Also, a variable that proxies for a construct may not be one in the sense that it does not represent it well or it has limitations or differences. However, the proxy may be the only possible