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International Management Research and Africa — An Action Research Perspective

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Volume 26, numéro 3, 2022

La recherche en management internationale et l'Afrique — Une perspective de recherche-action
International Management Research and Africa — An Action Research Perspective
La investigación de gestión internacional y África: una perspectiva de investigación de acción

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090296ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1090296ar>

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Éditeur(s)

HEC Montréal
Université Paris Dauphine

ISSN

1206-1697 (imprimé)
1918-9222 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Mbengue, A., Seny Kan, K. A., Biga-Diambeidou, M. & ogilvie, d. (2022). Word from the Guest Editors: International Management Research and Africa — An Action Research Perspective. *Management international / International Management / Gestión Internacional*, 26(3), 117–121.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1090296ar>

Word from the Guest Editors

International Management Research and Africa — An Action Research Perspective

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Research Problem

While multiple indicators reveal the economic awakening of Africa and several analysts predict that the world's strongest economic growth over the next few years will take place there, this continent is experiencing a growing interest from both political and economic actors, and management researchers, such as the editors of the *Academy of Management Journal*, who consider Africa to be a particularly promising context for management research (George *et al.*, 2016). In this general context of increasing attractiveness, more and more research has been devoted to managing organizations in the African context over the past decade (Abodohou *et al.*, 2018; Diaw *et al.*, 2020; Kamoche *et al.*, 2012; Zoogah, 2014; Zoogah & Beugré, 2012). Yet, despite this growing amount of studies, understanding the nature, determinants, and outcomes of African management still needs more research efforts. For example, little is known about what international management research can bring to Africa and what the managerial practices in Africa can bring to international management research. This dual question is specifically what is addressed in this special issue entitled "*International Management Research and Africa*."

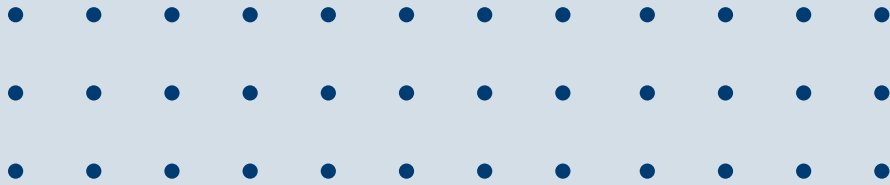
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this special issue is a combination of concepts and models rooted in International Business/International Management (IB/IM) and African Management (AM). IB/IM selected concepts and theories include those of Prasad *et al.* (2008) for a diachronic analysis of IB/IM, Werner & Brouthers (2002) and Contractor (2000) for their definitions of IM, and Wright & Ricks (1994) and Werner (2002) for their comparisons of IB and IM. Selected concepts and theories for AM include those of Amankwah-Amoah (2018), Amankwah-Amoah *et al.* (2022), Holtbrügge (2013), Inyang (2008), Jackson (2013), Jackson *et al.* (2008), Kamoche (1997), Walsh (2015), Zoogah (2008), and Zoogah *et al.* (2015). The conceptual

framework is extensively developed in the introductory article by the Guest Editors. First, it critically recalls the central characteristics of IB/IM as a field of research. Second, it presents how Africa is studied in this field. Third, it presents AM as one response to some of the criticisms of current research in IB/IM. Fourth, it shows some crossover between IB/IM and AM. Fifth, it shows how Africa-focused publications in the journal *Management international/ International Management/ Gestión Internacional* illustrate some of the foundations of the cross-fertilization conceptualized between IB/IM and AM.

Methods

The methods adopted for this special issue is an action research perspective, integrating action and research as a way of ensuring that research impacts practice for improvement (Rowell *et al.*, 2017). All four Guest Editors are among the leaders of SAM (Society for African Management; Serving Africa by Management), a network of academics, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders from social and community-based organizations interested and/or involved in the development of good management practices in Africa. Since its inception in 2012, SAM holds annual conferences throughout Africa and the rest of the World in cooperation with local host institutions and enables partnerships to advance new knowledge on management. It is in this vein that SAM proposed this special issue "International Management Research and Africa" to International Management. It was in 2016. After acceptance, the call for papers was published in 2017. It was the strategy of SAM to use this opportunity as an incentive in all of its research activities (25th International Conference of Strategic Management, Hammamet, Tunisia, in 2016; 5th African Management Conference in Libreville, Gabon, in 2017; 26th International Conference of Strategic Management, Lyon, France, in 2017; International Entrepreneurship Forum, Nancy, France, in 2018; 27th International Conference of Strategic Management, Montpellier, France, in 2018; 28th International Conference



of Strategic Management, Dakar, Senegal, in 2019). Many papers devoted to this topic were submitted, evaluated, and discussed during those conferences, allowing researchers to prepare their submissions for the special issue. Beyond the submission to the special issue, the objective was to substantially raise the amount of activity in management research in Africa. Between 2016 and 2019, more than two hundred papers have been prepared by researchers, thanks to the perspective of this special issue. At the beginning of 2019, forty-two proposals were initially received and were the subject of a first pre-evaluation by the editorial committee of the special issue. The authors were then invited to submit an improved version of their contribution, scrupulously observing the following recommendation: ensure that their article is better articulated with research in IB/IM in the spirit of answering the double question of the call for contributions: “What can research in international management bring to Africa and what can managerial practices in Africa bring to research in international management?”. Twenty-nine proposals were received in return. Following a second pre-evaluation by the Guest Editors, six proposals were selected. Beyond the classic selection criteria (clarity and interest of the research objective, mobilization of the relevant literature, quality of the conceptualization/theorization, quality of the methodological device, interest in the results, etc.), the main selection criterion was compliance with the explicit overhaul instructions mentioned above. Of the twenty-nine reviewed articles received, six were selected for subsequent submission to the official double-blind review cycle of the journal *Management International/International Management/Gestión Internacional*. Again, each article went through several rounds of review (up to four) by three anonymous reviewers. This is an opportunity to express our warmest thanks to the anonymous evaluators for their generosity, their patience, and the exceptional quality of their suggestions. At the end of this long but very useful process for guaranteeing the quality of the manuscripts, five articles were finally selected for publication.

Results and Contributions

The five articles in this special issue are written by authors from eight different countries: Benin, Brazil, England, France, Niger, Portugal, Senegal, and Tunisia. These five articles focus on five different geographical areas: sub-Saharan Africa considered as a whole, Benin, Niger, Senegal, and Tunisia. In terms of disciplinary

fields, two articles are in marketing, one in leadership and ethics, one in entrepreneurship, and one in the field of research on multinational groups. The diversity of fields is consistent with the cross-functional nature of the IB/IM field. One of the articles is purely conceptual, two are strongly conceptual and strongly empirical, and two others are moderately conceptual and strongly empirical. Among the four partly empirical articles, two adopt a qualitative method, and the two others a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative).

In the article entitled “Ethical Leadership: African Lessons for International Management”, **Joana Story, Nuno Guimarães-Costa, Miguel Pina e Cunha, Ken Kamoche, and Arménio Rego** draw from literature about leadership in Africa to (a) identify three research streams (functional, cultural, and critical) and (b) use these streams to make sense of research on ethics, organizations, and leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), as well as to analyze opportunities for future research. They do so by proposing four interpretative modes or approaches that allow the advancement of research in the field of ethical leadership in SSA. They argue that more paradigmatically diverse research on SSA is extremely important as it can allow for the development of textured theories on the context as well as open possibilities for revitalizing organization theory. The study of leadership and ethics in SSA is an interesting arena to explore a number of tensions and paradoxes that are pervasive in organization theory. If paradox theory is crystallizing prematurely around a number of tensions, the SSA context may contribute to the release of the study of paradox from the straightjacket of convergence and reveal a number of tensions permeating the practice of international management.

In the article entitled “Adoption of *Foguain Chawara* Practices in the Subsidiary of a Multinational in Niger: The Mobilization of Local Knowledge”, **Adama Tahirou Younoussi Meda** analyzes the adoption of “*foguain chawara*” practices in the subsidiary of a multinational specializing in oil exploration in Niger. The *foguain chawara*, which can be translated as local palaver from the Hausa language, is an old traditional institution calling on the elders and community life. This qualitative study conducted shows that the adoption of its practices by the local subsidiary of the CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) facilitates the intergenerational transfer of tacit knowledge as well as the integration of local knowledge into conflict management and business decision making. The results also show that the interaction of local employees and actors with Chinese company

executives reinforces local knowledge on risk management related to investments in Africa, the learning function, and negotiation methods based on the priority of the national interest. Finally, they indicate that the crossing of knowledge and experiences promotes mutual enrichment. While in previous works the *fogouain chawara* is simply presented as a place for discussion and the search for consensus, the author considers it as a traditional method of training, discovery, and knowledge transfer. In addition, the study shows the possibility of managing conflicts by mobilizing local knowledge. It further shows that local knowledge is also used for decision-making. The work shows that the spectacular increase in the volume of investments and the management procedures unsuited to local realities explain the rejection of multiculturalism in favor of the interculturality adopted by Asian companies.

In the article entitled “Collaborative Consumption in the African Socio-Digital Forum: An Exploratory Research in Whatsapp Groups in Benin”, **Maxime Jean-Claude Hounyovi** considers the role played by digital technology in the connection of economic spaces and the international opening of markets. The author questions the existence of cross-fertilization between the theories and prescriptions resulting from research in international management and the current managerial practices in digital ecosystems in an African context. The research examines the mechanisms of transformation of WhatsApp groups into socio-digital spaces conducive to collaborative consumption in the Beninese context. The data collected by a qualitative approach were subject to similarity analysis and full lexical Correspondence Factor Analysis. It appears that this change in the status of WhatsApp groups is the result of permanent dialectical interactions between group members in a spirit of reciprocity. The article is particularly stimulating. The subject remains of paramount importance and is likely to produce relevant knowledge on business practices in commercial WhatsApp groups and how they challenge international marketing theories.

In the article entitled “An Investigation into the Development of the Competencies of the Tunisian Entrepreneur: The Importance of International and Social Dimensions”, **Mourad Chouki, Kamel Mnisri, Mahrane Hofaidhllaoui, and Ghassen Souissi** use a narrative approach based on the life stories of Tunisian entrepreneurs to identify the entrepreneurial competencies developed over time and throughout the entrepreneurial journey in the Tunisian context. They show the importance of

social competencies that are related to the Tunisian entrepreneurial context as well as the need for a global entrepreneurial competencies framework. Their research raises awareness about the challenges of the international context in entrepreneurship, elucidates some ambiguities surrounding required global entrepreneurial competencies, and highlights the need for entrepreneurs to develop inter-cultural competencies. It also points out that the management of African organizations is under various influences that generate conflicting dynamics. Therefore, the inclusion of societal values is presented as a way to balance the productive goals of organizations with the preservation of the communal harmony of African societies such as Tunisia.

In the article entitled “Service Quality, Perceived Value and Purchase Intention in an Innovative Shopping Mall in Senegal: Effects of Traditional Values”, **Mbaye Fall Diallo and Fatou Diop-Sall** examine whether and to what extent traditional Senegalese values moderate the relationships between quality of service, the perceived value of a shopping center and the purchase intention of Senegalese consumers. The choice of hypotheses was made on the basis of cultural proximity to Africa. A mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative) was applied to test hypotheses based on the literature on service quality, shopping behavior, and perceived value in shopping centers in an African context or in other emerging countries. The results show that the quality of service influences the perceived value of the innovative shopping center which in turn positively affects the consumer’s purchase intention.

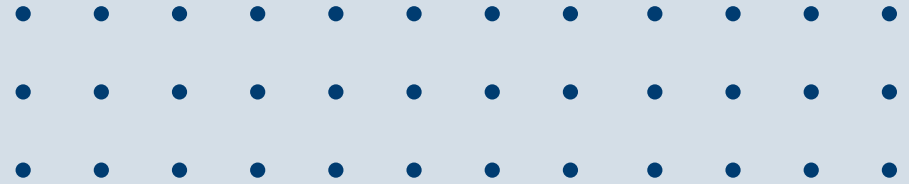
Conclusion

Rather than simply presenting the different texts of the special issue in a traditional way, this article has undertaken to report on what actually was action research initiated in 2016 by the SAM team. This article has specified the objective of the action research, the conceptual framework adopted, the methods used as well as the results obtained, of which the publication of this special issue is undoubtedly one of the most prominent. However, other results of this action research are visible through the mobilization of a large number of researchers, in and outside Africa, in revitalized research activity on management in Africa. Or, in the sensitization of various stakeholders, in and outside Africa, on the importance of research in management in Africa.

The desire to contribute to the research on management in Africa, in particular with researchers from French-speaking Africa, as well as the natural choice to innovate in form and content are two markers of SAM's deep identity. Created ten years ago, its objective is to put management research at the service of Africa. And not the other way around, only. The consequence of this posture is that it prepares to engage in ambitious research objectives, particularly in terms of scientific quality and robustness. This almost always requires taking the necessary time and mobilizing innovative approaches. Ambition-Determination-Method (ADM), is SAM's other creed. This means that the publication of the special issue "Research in international management and Africa" is essentially a tremendous encouragement to move forward.

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