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Word from the Guest Editors

Crisis and adaptation in International Management

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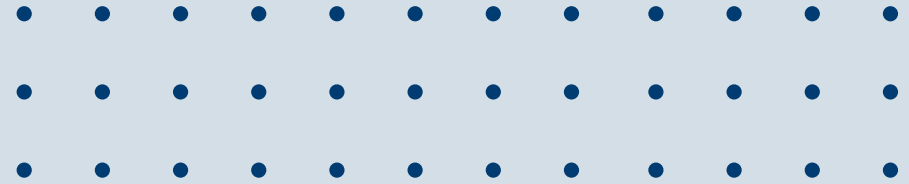
One word keeps coming up in public debate: “crisis”. This word is used in particular to refer to the worldwide pandemic of Covid 19, which has been raging for almost 3 years now, and it is true that this one presents all the characteristics of a crisis, those of an unpredictable, brutal event with serious consequences. Of course, we did not have to wait for such an event to debate about the future of our societies. Populist, nationalist and anti- or alter-globalization movements in particular had already raised many questions about globalization, its dynamics, its actors and beneficiaries. However, the arrival of Covid has exacerbated tensions, fueled concerns and accelerated certain transformations in trade, international management and companies, large and small. Covid has already affected our lifestyles, the vision of our governments, and our relationships with each other, and it is now becoming clear that it will continue to have effects on economies, businesses, and people.

Such effects do not of course spare the academic sphere. They raise questions for researchers about the very nature of their activity. Thus, how many colleagues have not at one time or another wondered about the meaning of their work? In light of these events, how can we not question the *raison d’être*, the usefulness of management research, the place of its institutions in society or its impact on various stakeholders? More pragmatically, how can one continue to practice one’s profession in these new circumstances and rethink one’s activity when the rules of the game change? Indeed, if the crisis affects Management Sciences research, it also requires that its actors adapt, as in the case of the French-speaking Association of International Management (Atlas-AFMI), under the aegis of which this special issue is published. In recent years, the association has had to find new ways to organize the scientific debate in international management. How to create a “community” when the crisis creates physical barriers between the actors of a scientific field? First of all, we had to find new ways to organize conferences at the heart of the association’s activity (online or hybrid conferences).

It was also a question of understanding how this crisis could affect the actors of International Management (which was done in particular by organizing a forum on this theme, in partnership with the French Foreign Trade Advisors).

As we can see, the unpredictable, massive and brutal nature of the crisis requires adaptation and inventiveness from researchers. However, as T. Kuhn reminds us, crises are not foreign to scientific activity. On the contrary, they are consubstantial to it. To confirm or to bring nuances to the existing is quite natural, and “normal” scientific activity is most often restricted to that, but let us not forget that if science, if knowledge progresses, it is not thanks to additions, confirmations of the existing paradigms (i.e., models accepted as common frameworks of work), but by “revolutions”. At certain moments the “normal” regime of science experiences a failure, a crisis, when the adjustments of the paradigm are no longer sufficient to solve the problems raised. If a scientist tries to progress in knowledge of the world by having faith in the theoretical elements and the tools of his paradigm, this paradigm is not intrinsically true, as shown by the recurrent appearance of anomalies. *“Discovery begins with the awareness of an anomaly, that is, the impression that nature, in one way or another, contradicts the results expected within the framework of the paradigm that governs normal science”*¹. These anomalies can appear as a result of chance, of a new method of experimentation, or of a new competing theory, but such anomalies can also emerge in extra-ordinary periods, periods of crisis such as the one we are experiencing. In other words, crisis stimulates scientific revolution and vice versa. We are certainly living in a most interesting time and potentially a new scientific revolution stimulated by this or these crises (Covid crisis, environmental crisis, global warming, or, closer to us as academics, the crisis of higher education, questioning of our institutions, of the quality or at least the nature of our academic contributions and of the evaluation of them, etc.).

1. Thomas S. Kuhn (trad. de l’anglais), *La Structure des révolutions scientifiques*, Paris, Flammarion, coll. “Champs”, 1983 (1^{re} éd. 1962, révision 1970), p. 83.



In this respect, the three articles presented in this selection, all from the 11th Annual Atlas-AFMI Conference², represent a kind of snapshot of French-speaking scientific research in International Management in this period of transition that we are currently experiencing. They all remind us that if crisis and adaptation are at the heart of scientific activity, they are also, more broadly, invariants of all human activity.

This is true of economic activity, and in particular of the activity of international organizations. This is what the first article in this special issue, by Manon Meschi, shows. In it, the author proposes a systematic review of the concept of “exogenous shock” in international management (IM). The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the need to integrate these events into internationalization strategies, and revealed a need for knowledge about their management, and about the preparedness and resilience of organizations, in order to mitigate their deleterious effects on international performance and survival. This systematic review, based on a content analysis of 176 articles, identifies research trends as well as avenues for future IM work. It demonstrates that “exogenous shocks” are not only a complex research object, but also a promising concept for research in International Management and more broadly in Management Sciences.

While the need for international organizations to adapt is particularly acute in times of crisis, it is also part of their day-to-day business. By operating at the borders of several environments, they are automatically confronted with a diversity of actors who present many different characteristics (social, cultural, linguistic, etc.). This diversity also, or even primarily, concerns the organization members. What are the different approaches to diversity management in international organizations or those in the process of becoming so? How can these managerial choices affect the internationalization process? These are the questions addressed in the second article of this selection, by Angélique Breuillot, Rachel Bocquet and Nicolas Poussing. These questions are particularly relevant in the case studied by the authors, that of SMEs. Indeed, these companies have particularly limited resources, so that effective diversity management appears crucial. After identifying different approaches to diversity management, the authors compare their effects. Using a sample of 1,348 Luxembourg SMEs, they

find that these different approaches have contrasting effects on the extent of internationalization. These results highlight the value of diversity management for the internationalization of SMEs and provide valuable recommendations for their managers.

If diversity is a concern for international organizations, it is also a concern for the researchers who study them. What are the different relevant dimensions of this diversity? How can they be measured? These are the questions that Manon Eluère and Clémence Pougué Biyong attempt to answer in the last article of this special issue. In this article, the authors study a particular dimension of diversity: linguistic disparity, which refers to the asymmetries and inequalities created by different proficiency levels in a common language. They propose a new tool to measure this disparity, and illustrate its use from an original field, that of professional women’s soccer teams. This methodological article sheds new light on diversity in International Management, and also highlights the practical implications for all management situations where the consequences of linguistic differences are a crucial issue.

2. This conference was held online from May 3 to 5, 2021