BJM BRITISH JOURNAL of MANAGEMENT BRITISH ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

British Journal of Management, Vol. 36, 481–499 (2025)
DOI: 10.1111/1467-8551.12910

Establishing a Contribution: Calibration, Contextualization, Construction and Creation

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Introduction and Overview

Riikka Sarala, Shuang Ren and Paul Hibbert

When we commissioned this editorial symposium we had two principal aims. The first was to provide guidance for authors who are new to the journal and those with more experience who are seeking to develop impactful contributions to our field. The second aim was to showcase the experience and insights of the team of associate editors at the *British Journal of Management* (*BJM*): all of the team are pivotal in the journal's mission and work hard to help authors make the most of their research.

With our twin aims in mind, we gave the team a broad remit. They were free to approach the task of offering guidance from their own standpoint and with their own choice of focus within *BJM*'s field. We also encouraged our colleagues to work in the way that they found most productive: independently, with other *BJM* associate editors or with colleagues from within their own networks. While other commitments and the heavy burdens of academic life meant that some of our colleagues could not participate in this symposium (but will hopefully be able to take part in further editorials), eight of the team took part, along with some collaborators. They covered a wide range of themes from *BJM*'s broad and inclusive take on the field of business, management and organization studies: a perspective on upper echelon decision-making and digital transformation (Arndt, Chang and Aharonson); a balanced view of artificial intelligence (Chowdhury and Budhwar); a standard-setting survey of trends in organizational behaviour (Costa and Daniels); a generative 'take' on religion in the workplace (Cullen); emerging directions in research on fintech and digital finance (Momtaz and Vismara); opportunities for new research in the management, knowledge and education space (Rigg); and a wayfinding view of equality, diversity and inclusivity research and practice (Śliwa). If you are developing your

[Correction added on 2 April 2025, after first online publication: The affiliation and biography have been updated for "Pawan Budhwar" in this version.]

	Foundations	Frontiers
Exemplification	**Calibration** Guiding the quality of approach, especially in relation to methods and theory. *Costa and Daniels*	**Contextualization** Establishing approaches / scoping emerging debates and areas of interest. *Chowdhury and Budhwar; Rigg; Śliwa*
Exploration	**Construction** Showing how to establish and characterize a latent theme in the journal and develop its potential. *Cullen*	**Creation** Projecting forward from current debates to new questions and theoretical possibilities. *Arndt, Chang and Aharonson; Momtaz and Vismara*

Figure 1. A framework for guidance in establishing a contribution.

research in any of those areas, you will find the advice invaluable.

Taken as a whole, our colleagues' work proved to be diverse, instructive and generative. Reflecting on their contributions and themes allowed us to construct the framework for guidance shown in Figure 1.

As you can see in the figure, the contributions from our editorial team members helped to show that there are two key aspects of the journal's terrain: the *foundations*, a set of principles and standards that show how to construct rigorous research in the field; and the *frontiers*, the emerging debates that allow the field to be extended – or for unmapped territory to be charted. The contributions also showed that there are two ways of engaging with these aspects of the terrain: through *exemplifying*, which roots guidance in key principles and particular exemplars in the journal's recent articles to show standards; and through *exploring*, which finds new opportunities through uncovering and characterizing a latent theme in the journal or making helpfully speculative projections from established debates. While we have mapped out the contributions from our colleagues in this way, it is important to note that you will find that each contribution covers much more than one of these areas – our aim is simply to highlight how authors might usefully focus their attention on each.

Collectively, the contributions also provide a short 'checklist' for paper submissions that are likely to do well at *BJM*. As you develop and refine your work for submission, the four quadrants in Figure 1 can serve as guiding principles and questions:

- **Calibration**: Bearing in mind that *BJM* covers the whole field of business, management and organization studies, is the submission crafted around current standards for methods and theoretical contributions within the relevant sub-discipline or interdisciplinary domain?
- **Contextualization**: Does the submission clearly connect with current debates and emerging themes, not just in the sub-discipline or interdisciplinary domain, but specifically within *BJM*?
- **Construction**: Does the submission craft its own literature-informed framework to support engagement with the field, rather than applying established frameworks and making only incremental advances?
- **Creation**: Does the submission (especially, but *not only*, for essays and conceptual work) take us somewhere that clearly steps beyond the familiar, perhaps with some element of carefully argued speculation about 'where to go next'?

Submissions that meet all of these criteria are likely to make the strongest kinds of contribution. That is, they are likely to leave readers surprised – but convinced. To reflect on and understand all of these criteria in depth, along with focal advice for your area of disciplinary specialization, we encourage you to read our colleagues' helpful contributions below. We hope that you find them as insightful, useful and instructive as we did: the individual contributions follow below, in the order presented in Figure 1.

Current Research Trends in Organizational Behaviour

Ana Cristina Costa and Kevin Daniels

The purpose of this editorial is to outline the recent trends in micro-organizational behaviour (micro-OB) in *BJM* for 2023–2024. As a core discipline in management studies, micro-OB focuses particularly on how individual and group behaviour in organizations evolves and adapts, while shaped by work norms and multilevel relationships and dynamics, governance and technological structures. Within this broad remit, micro-OB draws heavily upon work and organizational psychology, although not exclusively so. With the globalization of the economy and the aftermath of the recent pandemic, the very nature of working relationships has been transformed. The articles in this editorial provide insights into how research reflects some of these broader challenges and areas where future articles in *BJM* could make contributions. We focus on two broad areas that reflect the majority of micro-OB studies published in *BJM* recently. In total, we analyse 10 articles clustered around two major areas: individual behaviour and leadership.

Individual behaviour

Of six articles focused on individual employee behaviour, four focused on performance-enhancing aspects of employee behaviour, of which two focused on proactive behaviour, namely Ren, Tang and Zhang (2023) and Otterbring *et al.* (2024). Ren *et al.* investigated voluntary employee green behaviour and found that voluntary employee green behaviour was positively associated with employee affective commitment, but the association was conditional on complex mediation and moderation by perceived organizational support. Ottenbring *et al.* found that employee proactivity in retail services was related to enhanced consumer outcomes, extending prior work through methodological refinements. Vittal et al. (2023) also focused on customer service and found that enhanced employee service performance was associated with supervisor support and contact with beneficiaries. Mehralian *et al.* (2024) examined how organization-level intellectual capital enhancing human resource management practices related to organizational capacity for learning, finding that employees' innovative work behaviour was a mediator. In contrast to the previous four articles, Agarwal, Singh and Cooke (2024) examined a potentially counterproductive behaviour: knowledge hiding. Agarwal found that co-worker incivility was related to knowledge hiding through multiple mediators. Finally, and connecting with the next section, Singh *et al.* (2024) examined how line managers' behaviours relate to their line reports' organizational commitment and how line reports' organizational commitment relates to their managers' ratings of line reports' performance.

Leadership

Of the four papers on the theme of leadership, three emphasize the importance of the leader in shaping attitudes and behaviours of employees that are beneficial to the organization. For Duan *et al.* (2024) and Xu et al. (2023), the focal point of the research is improving employees' voice. While the former demonstrates how two forms of leaders' psychological ownership (PO), that is, promotive PO and preventive PO, show distinct pathways to endorse employees' voice, the latter research shows how employees' constructive voice can provide leaders with information and affect resources that help enhance Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationships. Both articles show the reciprocal nature of the relationship between leaders and followers. Also, the paper by Usman *et al.* (2024) underlines the importance of middle-managers developing learning ambidexterity strategies, both explorative and exploitative, to achieve higher performance levels. This paper highlights the role of organizational leaders, in particular with a servant leadership style, in facilitating structural empowerment and the importance of their boundary-spanning behaviour in developing ambidexterity strategies. The paper by De Clercq, Haq and Azeem (2023) investigates the role of employees' faith/religion in buffering negative feelings of psychological contract breaches through psychological withdrawal from organizational leaders (e.g. supervisors, line-managers, etc.) to explain failures in meeting job performance requirements, such as meeting sensitive deadlines. Although there is less interactional focus between leaders and followers, this paper highlights the impact of an outside-work variable, often in the private sphere, such as religion/faith, into a work situation. Often organizational behaviour researchers disregard important non-work aspects such as religion/faith in shaping work perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.

Theoretical perspectives

In terms of the contributions to theory, seven articles – including all four articles on leadership – draw from resource theories: either conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002) or resource theory in combination with another conceptual approach. This is an interesting approach in attempting to understand employee behaviour and leadership relationships from the point of view of resources (rather than demands) and the underlying motivational drives within a psychological framework for understanding everyday life. Social exchange also featured as a theoretical perspective underpinning two other articles reviewed. Social exchange approaches also feature heavily in articles published in *BJM* relating to employment relations (Dobbins and Dundon, 2017; Johnstone and Wilkinson, 2018; Nayani *et al.*, 2022), underlining the potential of social exchange approaches to connect macro- and micro-studies of organizational behaviour.

Methodologies adopted

From a methodological point of view, all 10 articles propose rigorous, quantitative research designs. Time-lagged and/or multi-source data are prevalent. Time-lagged and/or multi-source data enable authors to establish a sequential series of events and avoid common method variance with dependent variables by triangulating data from different sources. Four articles also reported multiple studies, indicating the importance of replication in studies reliant on statistical inference. Ren *et al.* (2024) reported two studies, both with time-lagged data and one with multisource data. Three studies reported on field studies and vignette scenario experiments (Duan *et al.*, 2024; Otterbring *et al.*, 2024; Xu *et al.,* 2023). There is a wide geographical spread of samples across four continents (South America and Africa were not represented), and this reflects the spread of the institutional affiliations of the authors.

Looking back and looking forwards

The geographical spread of samples and authors indicates that the title of the *British Journal of Management* reflects the journal's home and not its reach, highlighting *BJM*'s role as a word-leading outlet for micro-OB research. However, there is always scope for enhancement. Given the volume of submissions received at *BJM*, the submissions that are more likely to 'stand out from the crowd' make significant conceptual contributions, take the best of what is currently published, and supplement these building blocks with rigorous methodological innovations.

One major topic area missing from our review is that of workplace wellbeing, health and safety. Studies specifically on workplace safety occur in other major journal outlets, albeit infrequently. However, studies of workplace health and wellbeing form a major corpus of research in micro-OB and occur frequently in other outlets. There have been two studies published recently in *BJM* concerned with worker wellbeing and health (Nayani *et al.*, 2022; Park and Koch, 2024), although both were concerned with the COVID-19 pandemic and one was focused on organizational responses.

In terms of methods, the frequent use of multi-source and/or time-lagged data reflects methodological sophistication but also the long-standing commitment of many of the leading micro-OB/work psychology outlets to methods that are capable of stronger causal inference than purely cross-sectional, single-source methods. Such methodological approaches are tractable in studies of individuals and small groups – a luxury that other areas of management studies do not often share. We should therefore expect *BJM* to uphold the highest standards of methodological rigour in each of its constituent areas. However, we note that time-intensive sampling methods (e.g. experience sampling, diary studies) were not used in the studies we reviewed, yet such designs feature frequently in other leading outlets. In addition, field studies with the strongest power for causal inference (i.e. appropriately powered randomized controlled trials [RCTs]) were also absent from our review. This most likely reflects the difficulty in conducting RCTs in organizational settings. The absence of qualitative studies in our review is also notable.

Further, none of the articles in our review has actually addressed the underlying dynamics of their phenomena over time. Employee behaviour, cognition, affect and leadership relationships are not static phenomena. Therefore, it would benefit articles and advance the research to include time-related measures that elucidate trajectories of change and enhance causal inference by examining if changes in one variable are related to subsequent changes in another. Examples from other outlets are studies that have used multi-wave data to model relationships between changes in dependent, mediator and independent variables (Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2023), trajectories of change in variables over time (Kwok, Shen and Brown, 2021) and dynamic relationships between variables while accounting for stable relationships (Ford *et al.*, 2023).

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Balanced Perspective of Artificial Intelligence

Soumyadeb Chowdhury and Pawan Budhwar

Introduction

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked widespread discussions and debates in both management and academic spheres (Brown *et al.*, 2024). The conversation has often been dominated by extremes — either AI's transformative potential (Ameen *et al.*, 2024) or alarm over its possible dystopian consequences in human resource management (Lindebaum and Fleming, 2024). While both optimism and concern have their place, what is frequently missing is a balanced perspective that considers both the bright and dark sides of AI (Budhwar *et al.*, 2023). Notably, the darker and riskier aspects of AI (and its variants) remain underexplored in empirical research (Chowdhury, Budhwar and Wood, 2024). This piece seeks to move beyond polarized narratives, fostering a more informed and constructive discourse on AI, accompanied by a research agenda.

Balanced perspective of AI and implications

A balanced perspective on AI is essential for advancing a nuanced understanding that recognizes both the technology's transformative potential and its inherent risks (von Krogh, Roberson and Gruber, 2023). Individually valid, polarized viewpoints fail to provide actionable insights for responsible, ethical and effective AI development, adoption and evolution in business and management. Pessimistic narratives, which emphasize risks such as job displacement, surveillance or societal inequities, can create a climate of fear and resistance, often stifling innovation and constructive exploration of AI's benefits and opportunities. Conversely, unchecked optimism may neglect significant risks such as algorithmic bias, surveillance and job displacement.

A balanced approach fosters a pragmatic dialogue, focusing not only on what AI can achieve but also on how it can align with organizational values, societal norms and ethical frameworks. This balance is particularly relevant in business and management research, where the stakes involve organizational decision-making, resource allocation and social impact (Vanneste and Puranam, 2024). A balanced perspective requires integrating human (management) judgment to evaluate and deploy AI technologies ethically, responsibly and effectively. These needs defining a *balanced governance framework* — a boundary within which AI usage and applications align with value creation, ethical principles, moral considerations, organizational goals and societal norms. Such a framework is essential for mitigating risks, maximizing benefits, navigating the complexities of AI adoption and keeping pace with the rapid evolution of AI.

Research themes and agenda

Adopting a balanced perspective, AI research not only can contribute to advancing existing theoretical perspectives but will also facilitate the development of new frameworks while providing actionable guidance for practitioners. To achieve this, four key themes and their corresponding research questions are presented below, aiming to enhance and guide future AI scholarship in business and management. These themes aim to address critical dimensions of AI adoption that are underexplored, ensuring that AI research remains relevant, theoretically sound, empirically rigorous and impactful in both academic and practical contexts.

Balanced AI governance frameworks. The task of developing, empirically testing and implementing balanced AI governance frameworks is essential for addressing the dual perspectives of AI adoption. These frameworks should operate within specific boundary conditions that define their applicability and effectiveness. Although such boundaries are currently underexplored, establishing them will help ensure the framework remains actionable, contextually relevant and capable of navigating the ethical, social and economic challenges of AI (Kemp, 2023). By addressing the following questions, future research can contribute to creating evidence-based frameworks that are both theoretically robust and practically implementable.

- How can balanced AI governance frameworks address sector-specific ethical challenges while remaining broadly applicable across industries?
- What metrics can be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of AI governance frameworks in

mitigating risks, enhancing trust and improving business productivity?
- What are the barriers and enablers for stakeholder acceptance and adoption of balanced AI governance frameworks?
- What are the key boundary conditions that influence the applicability and effectiveness of balanced AI governance frameworks in addressing the dual perspectives of AI adoption?

AI's role in decision-making: complementing human judgment. As AI technologies become more embedded in organizational processes, it is essential to understand how, why and under which conditions AI can complement human judgment rather than replace it (Raisch and Fomina, 2024). This involves exploring the dynamics of AI–employee collaboration, where AI's strengths – such as data analysis, speed and pattern recognition – enhance human abilities such as contextual understanding, ethical reasoning and creativity (Chowdhury et al., 2024). The synergy between AI and human judgment may depend on several factors, which leads us to the following research questions directing future research in this domain.

- What hybrid models of human–AI collaboration are most effective in strategic and operational decision-making?
- How can organizations structure decision-making processes to maximize the strengths of both AI and human input?
- How does the effectiveness of AI–human decision-making models vary across industries and business processes?
- What are the measurable outcomes of human–AI collaboration in terms of decision-making quality, efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction, and how can we assess them?

Metrics for measuring AI's benefits and risks in organizations. Balancing the benefits and risks of AI in organizational applications is essential for responsible and sustainable adoption (Giudici, Centurelli, & Turchetta, 2024). Designing metrics and tools to quantify and assess the trade-offs between AI's value generation (e.g. efficiency, innovation and data-driven insights) and its potential drawbacks (e.g. bias, transparency, accountability and ethical concerns) is a critical step in this process. Such metrics can provide organizations with actionable insights to guide AI adoption, development, deployment, governance and continual improvement. This approach expands understanding of how organizations assess and respond to the social and ethical dimensions of technology, without undermining value creation. The following research questions will explore the intersection of risk management, ethics and the dual perspectives of AI adoption, focusing on the balance between maximizing innovation and minimizing harm.

- What indicators are most effective for measuring the balance between AI's benefits and risks across different industries?
- Which methodologies can be used to validate the reliability and accuracy of balance metrics in assessing AI's impact?
- What role do stakeholder perceptions play in shaping the adoption and refinement of these metrics?
- How can organizations ensure that metrics evolve with technological and ethical advancements in AI?

Cross-cultural perspectives. AI technologies are increasingly shaping global business operations, yet their adoption, regulation and perception are deeply influenced by cultural contexts. Understanding cultural nuances is critical for fostering equitable, ethical and effective AI deployment across diverse regions (Robinson, 2020). Moreover, such understanding can facilitate cross-cultural learning, enabling the import and adaptation of best practices to different cultural settings (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2013). Insights gained from cross-cultural learning can provide valuable insights to advance and refine existing theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, understanding of cultural nuances can guide multinational organizations in adapting AI solutions to align with local cultural values and expectations, ensuring a balanced approach to AI's risks and benefits. Therefore, the following research questions aim to focus on the intersection of cultural factors and the balanced perspective of AI adoption, regulation and perception.

- How do cultural differences impact the development and implementation of AI regulations?
- How do cultural contexts influence organizational strategies for AI adoption and integration?
- What lessons can be drawn from cross-cultural comparisons of regulatory approaches to AI?
- What role does cultural leadership play in shaping ethical standards, employee wellbeing and societal expectations for AI technologies?

Conclusion

In conclusion, adopting a balanced perspective will enable organizations to harness AI's transformative potential responsibly while navigating its complexities and risks. The proposed research agenda highlights critical dimensions of AI adoption that remain under-explored. Addressing these themes will equip scholars and practitioners with knowledge and tools to align AI's deployment with human judgement, organizational goals, societal norms and ethical principles. This will contribute to a more equitable, ethical and effective integration of AI into business and management practices, bridging the gap between theoretical enquiry and practical applications.

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New Directions in Management Learning, Knowledge and Education Research

Clare Rigg

A focus on management learning, knowledge and education (MKE) is new for *BJM*. It is not that there have not been occasional papers over the years, but with the launch in 2024 of a regular MKE section in the journal. *BJM* is joining other well-established journals such as *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Management Learning*, *Journal of Management Education* and *International Journal of Management Education* in recognizing the importance of management education and management learning to the cultivation of management knowledge and practice. *BJM*'s inaugural MKE section included the paper 'A Shout-out for the Value of Management Education Research: 'Pedagogy is not a Dirty Word' (Mason *et al.*, 2024). In this, the authors argued that management learning and education (MLE) has a responsibility for educating future leaders of organizations in all sectors with the knowledge and capabilities 'to deliver sustainable futures for the planet and people' and that 'research into and innovations in both curriculum content and pedagogy are urgently needed to lead our world out of crisis' (Mason *et al.*, 2024, p. 539). This paper echoed a companion piece in the same *BJM* issue by McPhail *et al.* (2024): 'Reimagining Business and Management as a Force for Good'. In this, the authors 'question whether our existing theoretical lenses, along with fundamental underlying assumptions about what constitutes labour, value and its creation and the nature of assets, liabilities and materiality, act as a barrier to advancing business and management practice as a force for good and explore whether we need to go beyond applying existing theory to new research questions' (McPhail *et al.*, 2024, p. 1099).

This call for management educators and business/management schools to recognize that we have an important role in shaping the assumptions, world views and practices of our graduates and their organizations is not a recent phenomenon, but it is becoming louder and more pressing. Since at least the 1980s there have been increasingly loud critiques of the perceived neglect in mainstream management education of broader ethical, social and environmental concerns and its dominant emphasis on a logic of perpetual economic growth, increasing consumption and corporate success, all of which create tension with the growing awareness of environmental and social issues, such as climate change and resource depletion. In response, a move for a critical management education called for a reimagining of what it means to manage, focusing not simply on efficiency and profitability but also on values such as social justice, sustainability and responsibility to employees, consumers and society at large. (See Rigg and Trehan, 2025 for a collection of both historical and contemporary writing on ideas and practices of critical management educators.)

In the face of the increasing climate crisis, resource depletion, social division and economic polarization, the challenge for innovative MKE research and practice has become ever-more imperative. A scan of recent articles across the MLE journals referred to above identifies five main themes that help define questions for future MKE/MLE research. The first is the fundamental question: What is the purpose of management learning and education? (e.g. Lindebaum, 2024; Reed, Śliwa and Prasad, 2024; Vongswasdi *et al.*, 2024). In the past, research might have concentrated on trying to evaluate the financial return on investment from MLE or the effects on other performance outcomes. Now, as Mason *et al.* (2024) emphasize, the 'value' or impact of MLE can and needs to be so much more.

The second theme relates to epistemological questions and how particular forms of MLE can challenge our assumptions and change the ways we think about business and management practice. For example, Ong, Cunningham and Parmar (2024) in their paper 'How and Why Does Economics Education Make Us See Honesty as Effortful?' explore ways in which MLE can be culpable in cultivating narrow economic and utilitarian assumptions about the role of business in society and of management practice within this. This focus on how business schools can play a role in driving epistemic change and transforming managerial thought by embodying a duty of care towards the natural environment is also picked up within *BJM* (for example, see Mughal *et al.* (2024), call for special issue).

A third important theme for future MKE research relates to questions of how MKE either perpetuates social inequality or can play a role in disrupting such inequity. For example, Naya, Contu and Poole (2024) explore the dangers of MLE reproducing racialized socioeconomic inequality. Similarly, Eisenman *et al.* (2024:142) identify how 'economic inequality is reproduced because business students uncritically accept the neoliberal myth of meritocracy'.

A fourth theme is the business of business schools. Recent years have seen an upsurge in the number of articles examining how the institutional norms, practices and increasingly neoliberal ideologies of business schools constrain attempts by educators to respond to calls for greater responsibility in their curricula and pedagogies. For example, see Hartz (2024) on the degradation of professional autonomy and Gavin *et al.* (2024) on experiences of attempts to forge collegiality in the neoliberal academy. There are certainly many questions that deserve further research, such as the institutional barriers or the role of different stakeholders, such as accreditation bodies.

A fifth theme, which perhaps has received most coverage to date, but where we still need to know much more, concerns the pedagogical innovations that enable educators and business schools to effectively respond to the challenges identified above. We see increasing numbers of articles published in the MLE journals mentioned above, as well as in others, that describe accounts of pedagogical innovations that try, for example, to develop sustainability awareness in management students (e.g. Edwards and Küpers, 2024; Kiss, Köves and Király, 2024) or to address socioeconomic inequality (Cavalcanti and Silva, 2024; Kumar *et al.*, 2024). At this point in time, it is arguably opportune to add depth to the evaluation and theorization of these. Also to explore and evaluate questions such as whether particular MLE pedagogies make a difference to the ways people do leadership and management in practice, and if so, in what ways? And to consider further ways in which management education colludes in the silencing of topics or instances where pedagogies that set out to be critical get co-opted.

These five themes are indicative of the kinds of valuable MKE/MLE questions we would like to see explored in *BJM*. All could benefit from further empirical research and would therefore suit a Management Theory or Education Theory paper. However, informed provocations to debate on any of these themes could also be addressed in an essay (termed a Management Educator paper). One example of a recent *BJM* essay is Lindebaum and Fleming's (2024) argument that ChatGPT undermines human reflexivity, scientific responsibility and responsible management research. A second example is a paper by Edwards *et al.* (2024), who, defining themselves as 'mothering academics', reflect on working adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic to argue for a more balanced engagement with academia and an acceptance of the 'good enough'. We are excited to see essays (Management Educator articles) submitted for the new MKE section of *BJM*, and we very much hope to see interesting data and original theorizing for MKE Management Theory and Education Theory articles. (See British Journal of Management for further details on contribution types.)

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It Takes All the Running You Can Do: Making Progress with Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Research and Practice

Martyna Śliwa

Equality, diversity and inclusivity research in BJM*: Running well and for a long time*

Business and management (B&M) research reflects the concerns and challenges that businesses and other types of organizations grapple with at a given time, as well as the interests of scholars who pursue it. Given the social changes that have been taking place over the past few decades, it is not surprising that a rich body of publications has been built around matters pertaining to equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) in various organizational settings. *BJM* has been a welcoming forum for researchers advancing EDI-related research. It has consistently provided a platform for a myriad of topics, perspectives and methodological approaches.

Already in the first ever issue of *BJM*, Dopson and Stewart (1990, p. 13) argued that organizations were becoming more diverse, and that this presented managers with the requirement to 'acquire new skills', especially in terms of managing 'staff of different backgrounds'. Since then, true to its pluralist ethos, *BJM* has published contributions examining questions related to EDI from a range of angles, including articles addressing the diversity–performance nexus (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2024; Pandey *et al.*, 2023), scrutinizing the EDI academic discourses (Oswick and Noon, 2014) and business practices (Kele and Cassell, 2023) and explicitly focusing on the discrimination and exclusion of members of minoritized groups (e.g. Edwards *et al.*, 2024; Priola et al., 2014). Importantly, *BJM* articles have provided readers with insights into a variety of aspects of diversity, also considered through an intersectional lens (e.g. Kelan, 2023; Marlow, Greene and Coad, 2018). All these examples suggest that EDI scholarship in *BJM* has been 'running well' over the years. Yet, for research on EDI to continue to make meaningful impact, more work is needed.

EDI research and practice in a 'fast sort of country'

Many readers will recall the following dialogue between Alice and the Red Queen, from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

> 'In our country', said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd generally get to somewhere else – if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing'.
> 'A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'

Metaphorically speaking, EDI research and practice have experienced a similar situation to that described by the Red Queen. Thanks to all the work accomplished so far, progress has been made in relation to our understanding of the complex ways in which discrimination and exclusion operate, and with regard to what can and should be done in order for organizations to become more inclusive and equitable. At the same time, the extent of this progress has not been sufficient to eradicate organizational discrimination and exclusion of members of minoritized groups. Moreover, in the last few years, in particular, we have witnessed a backlash against organizational EDI initiatives. There have also been examples of a backlash within the academic community against EDI research.

The opponents of EDI research and practice dismiss efforts aimed at inclusivity and equitability as 'woke' (Prasad and Śliwa, 2024). This rise of 'anti-woke' rhetoric and practices – which has occurred in parallel with the rise in populism across the world (Kerr, Robinson and Śliwa, 2024) – has been harmful to EDI research and initiatives (Harding, Tassabehji and Lee, 2024; Thomason *et al.*, 2023). Its presence also means that, at this point, a lot of effort is required from EDI scholars and from journals such as *BJM* just to make sure that progress with organizational inclusivity and equitability is not lost.

Running twice as fast – but in which direction?

Just as Alice found out from the Red Queen, so do all of us who care about making organizations more inclusive and equitable need to realize that, if we aspire to progress with EDI research and practice, then we must 'run twice as fast' as we have done thus far to advance the field. In addition to intensifying our research efforts in the face of the 'anti-woke' backlash and other challenges facing businesses and other organizations in our – ecologically damaged, politically polarized, socioeconomically unequal and unsettled by AI – post-pandemic world, it is important to reflect on the directions of these efforts.

There are many potential avenues for EDI scholarship. Here, I suggest four possibilities. The first of these refers to advancing research that is rooted in solid theoretical foundations – and possibly, bringing together knowledge developed within different paradigms (Gagnon, Augustin and Cukier, 2022) – and that, above all, is underpinned by a pro-EDI change agenda and a practice orientation. We need to know more about 'what works' in different social and organizational contexts, and share examples of good practice: EDI initiatives and interventions that bring about positive outcomes. Second, further research is needed that explicitly addresses the broader social embeddedness and political dynamics associated with issues pertaining to the implementation of inclusivity and equitability policies in organizations, as illustrated by Naya, Contu and Poole's (2024) fine-grained analysis of the impact of anti-racist proclamations on a US business school and its university. Third, it is crucial for EDI scholarship to pay much more attention to groups and topics that, to date, have received little space in B&M research, such as the exclusion from social and organizational life of women in Afghanistan or the anti-LGBTQIA backlash in Africa (Śliwa, forthcoming). Finally, we must direct our research efforts not only to addressing current issues and concerns, but also to coming up with solutions and strategies for making the future world of work more inclusive and equitable (Georgiadou, Özbilgin and Özkazanç-Pan, 2024).

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Religious Experience and Workplaces: Management Research for Evolving 'Faithscapes'

John G. Cullen

BJM's submission guidelines ask prospective authors to demonstrate how their manuscript engages with, and advances, ongoing research conversations or debates in the journal. This short note distinguishes the nature of *BJM*'s conversations about religion, work and management so potential authors can consider how, and if, their work on faith connects with the concerns of this important part of our scholarly community.

Since Max Weber explored how theological innovation resulted in the behaviours that drove the emergence of late capitalism, religious ideas have continued to inspire new thinking in management and organizational studies. For example, the turn away from traditional forms of organized religion towards an expressive form of 'self-spirituality' (Heelas, 1996) has manifested in the workplace through expressivist forms of management training (Ackers and Preston, 1997; Bell and Taylor, 2004), self-help programmes (Cullen, 2009; Oswick, 2009) and mindfulness-at-work initiatives (Holm and Islam, 2024).

Research that attempts to explore religion and work often risks treating faith or spirituality as variables that can be easily measured or quantitatively correlated with another aspect of organizational life. Some reviews attempt to encapsulate the totality of published research on religion, faith and spirituality in the workplace, but the extent to which these actively progress research on religion and work is questionable and can create a lack of clarity about where religion ends and spirituality begins. Sometimes they present a distorted and stereotypical view of religious workers' experience of their faith or a reductive account of how faith influences professional identity or corporate performance.

Rather than assuming a unified field of study, Tracey's (2012) overview of religion and organization identified the various research conversations in the diverse 'sociologies' of religion and organizational research. *BJM* has published papers in the literatures in many of these fields. These include: religion and individual behaviours in organizations (Ancarani, Ayach and Di Mauro, 2016; De Clercq, Haq and Azeem, 2023); comparative studies (Ozkan, Temiz and Yildiz, 2023); contextual studies (Li and Wang, 2023) and business ethics (Jatmiko, Iqbal and Ebrahim, 2024; West *et al.*, 2016). However, it is clear that the most pronounced area in the journal is in the field that Tracey identifies as 'Religion and Social Identity'. Tracey notes that, although this is a highly populated literature in the sociology of religion, 'management scholars arguably have greater potential to make a distinctive contribution [on] the role of religious identity in secular organizations. For example, exploring the relationship between individuals' religious identity and their professional identity, the tensions and contradictions that may exist between them and the processes through which they are reconciled has the potential to make an important contribution' (2012, p. 115). While earlier *BJM* papers examined religion as an important aspect of social identity (Herriot and Scott–Jackson, 2002; Kamenou, 2008), recent contributions have focused on how people of faith negotiate their identities in corporate or secular contexts (Purchase et al., 2018; Arifeen and Gatrell, 2020; Priola and Chaudhry, 2021). Adopting a more emic perspective on the lived experiences of the professionals they study, these articles respectfully represent the identities of employees and businesspeople in a way that generates insights for managers and professionals alike.

In short, these works represent faith in the context of organizational life as something that is dynamic and resistant to quantification. *BJM*'s research conversation on religion and work will be enhanced by contributions that connect with the evolving way in which faith traditions change and with how managers and employees experience these shifts. For the purposes of brevity, these evolving conditions are referred to as 'faithscapes'. Rather than assuming, for example, that all Christians feel the same way about a health issue or that all Jews feel the same way about a political situation, a 'faithscape' perspective is conscious of the plurality that exists within existing religious traditions and the dynamic nature of an individual's experience of their belief. For example, Bullivant, Farias and Lanman (2019) suggest that while there are more atheists than believers in the UK, it would be inaccurate to assume that there are no spiritual practices or values within this faithscape. 'Unbelief in God does not necessarily entail unbelief in other supernatural phenomena' (p. 2), and there is rich diversity in how atheism and agnosticism are experienced. Seeing religion as a faithscape means viewing it in its broadest terms, while recognizing that it is experienced at cultural and local levels in very diverse ways. The concept certainly makes the study of religion in workplaces more challenging, but it also opens up more management research possibilities. Rather than assuming that religion or belief are merely boxes to be ticked on censuses or surveys, a faithscape perspective opens up new possibilities for deepening our understanding of how work and organizational life are experienced in the contemporary workplace.

Faithscapes can also be understood at the macro social or cultural level, where profound changes occur over short periods of time and dominant religious groups rapidly go into abeyance (Booth and Goodier, 2023; McGreevy, 2023; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012; Smith *et al.*, 2015), the influence of other faith-groups grows (Hardy, 2021) or new approaches emerge (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Faithscapes can be studied at the meso-level, such as when managers grapple with the challenge of deciding the boundaries of religious faith expression and accommodation or of addressing discrimination. Adopting a faithscape research perspective allows for research on how managers and co-workers, whether religious or not, engage with the social, legal, organizational and cultural aspects of religion (or non-religion) in contemporary workplaces.

BJM research has focused on the study of faithscapes at the micro-level, where individual employees navigate their own religious beliefs through organizational structures that accommodate faith traditions differently or not at all. William James' monumental *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1906, [1902]) demonstrated that an individual's experience with faith and belief changes not only throughout their lives, but sometimes on a daily basis (Bell, Taylor and Driscoll, 2012)! With such fluidity, mechanistic understandings of a person's inner life using measures such as 'religiosity' can appear sterile and reductive. This does not mean that quantitative articles on faithscapes are unwelcome: indeed *BJM*'s author guidelines are clear that empirical papers can employ any methodology as long as it is of a high standard that is appropriate to the questions or problems the paper seeks to address.

BJM's tradition of studying religious experience in organizations often involves nuanced, qualitative accounts that are sensitive to the diversity of expressions and perspectives that can exist. Social scientists have employed psychoanalytical (Domínguez, Montero Fernańdez and Torok, 2018) and critical (Bell, 2008) approaches to developing theories of religious experience, as they have particular utility in identifying the social, psychological and cultural forces that influence the dynamics of an individual's inner world. These and similar approaches, which attempt to 'get under the hood' of faithscapes in workplaces, will be welcome additions to *BJM*'s research conversations on religion, management and organizational life.

These conversations on religion and identity in workplaces have explored the experiences of women, and there are opportunities to understand how other significant aspects of identity (sexual orientation, political orientation, class, etc.) impact the interface between faithscapes and experiences of work. Finally, although the major world religions are well represented in management research in general, the experiences of members of smaller faith groups and new religious movements have received much less attention, which provides opportunities to create new understandings and insights for management and organizational research in *BJM*.

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Rethinking Upper Echelon Decision-Making and Competition in the Digital Era: Key Shifts for Future Research

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Digital transformation, including recent advances in AI and automation, fundamentally reshapes the business landscape. Yet, management research has been slow to document these changes, identify best practices, and offer comprehensive insights that can guide firms, managers and policymakers. Despite the impact of digital advancements, management theory has yet to develop a framework of digitalization that would enable the systematic accumulation of knowledge on managing businesses in the digital era. In the following, we identify some areas of interest that, we believe, offer ample opportunity for future research particularly related to the upper-echelon and corporate entrepreneurship settings.

CEO skills

The digital era demands new and possibly different CEO skills, especially around data-driven decision-making, digital communication and customer experience design. Leaders today must possess digital literacy, adaptability and the ability to foster a vision that balances technological advances with human elements. While there is growing recognition of the CEO's role in driving digital transformation, research on the specific skills and characteristics that make leaders effective in a digital context remains limited (Dong *et al.*, 2024). Future research could examine which competencies are most critical for CEOs in digitally transforming organizations, how they can develop these skills and the impact of data-driven decision-making on long-term strategic outcomes.

AI and routines

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming integral to organizational routines, reshaping operations through empowerment, augmentation and automation. AI empowers individuals by enabling them to accomplish tasks previously beyond their capabilities; augments work by enhancing both efficiency and effectiveness; and automates processes by optimizing workflows and operational methodologies. This integration represents a paradigmatic shift in organizational practices, offering significant operational benefits while simultaneously introducing potential disruptions. The evolving interaction between AI-driven routines and organizational culture necessitates a more nuanced understanding of how these changes influence human dynamics within firms (Ameen *et al.*, 2024). Future research should examine the specific contributions of AI tools to organizational routines and assess whether these tools facilitate or hinder processes such as learning, adaptation and collaboration. Additionally, further studies should explore how organizations can balance AI-driven efficiency with human-centred insights and values and examine the critical role that organizational culture plays in this transformative process. Investigating these dimensions is essential for organizations seeking to leverage AI's benefits while maintaining a focus on human-centric values and fostering a diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment.

Human–AI interface

In an era where AI increasingly shapes corporate decisions, it is essential to examine how entrepreneurial vision and human-centric values are maintained. Digital transformation accelerates innovation and unlocks new business models, yet the challenge lies in balancing automation with the human aspects of entrepreneurship, such as intuition, empathy and creativity (Arndt, Ng, Huang, 2021). While AI can optimize processes, there is limited research on how it impacts corporate culture and employee well-being and what the role of human–computer interfaces is in optimizing the concerted efforts of AI-enhanced human decision-making. Future studies could address how firms cultivate digitally adaptive cultures, the human skills necessary for digital entrepreneurship, and strategies for CEOs to ensure technology serves both organizational and human goals.

Sources of innovation

In many industries, a few large players dominate. This domination often limits opportunities for smaller firms to achieve substantial growth, especially away from the technology frontier. These smaller players, however, are regularly drivers of progress. Innovation frequently originates from small players or even from individuals who exploit new DIY tools and platforms to introduce unique products or solutions. This dynamic creates a paradox: while major players control market share, smaller actors drive much of the creativity and disruption. Although some research acknowledges this divide (D'angelo, Ghezzi and Cavallo, 2024), little is known about how small firms navigate these ecosystems, particularly in industries resistant to new entrants. Future research could examine how DIY innovation influences market dynamics, the barriers faced by small firms, the role of trust-based and democracy-driven innovation systems, and the potential for these players to scale in industries dominated by large incumbents.

Ecosystems and open innovation

The digital era is shifting innovation from closed models to open, collaborative ecosystems where innovation agents co-create and share data, leveraging platforms to innovate together (Ng, Arndt and Huang, 2020). Digital platforms facilitate coopetition, partnership and collaboration, transforming data into a valuable asset for both opportunity identification and decision-making (Blut and Wang, 2024). While some research highlights the benefits of digital ecosystems for rapid testing and iteration, questions remain about how firms balance openness and collaboration with IP protection and cybersecurity. Future research could explore how companies manage competing interests within digital ecosystems, the factors driving successful coopetition, and the role of AI in accelerating technological evolution, particularly in contributing to disproportionate distributions of market power among innovators. Additionally, research could investigate how lean startup methods can be effectively applied within these collaborative frameworks.

Revisiting traditional concepts

Traditional management concepts provide the foundation for our understanding on how organizations achieve their goals through planning, resource allocation and performance optimization. Advanced AI may lead to a reconfiguration of the organization and its activities that may require revisiting our way of thinking about organizational behaviour theories and concepts and organizational strategy theories and concepts in large corporations and small and medium enterprises (Inceoglu, Vanaker and Vismara, 2024). For example, priorly studied areas such as power distribution, the role of internal and external networks, capabilities, transactions within and external to the firm, and the skills and capabilities of the top management team may now be viewed differently. In this vein, Arndt *et al.* (2023) highlighted the evolution of absorptive capacity and suggested that in the era of advanced AI, scholarly focus should return to the role of management and managerial decision processes rather than the current focus on prior R&D capabilities.

Conclusion

The digital era has been transforming the way individuals think and act and, with that, organizations' behaviour and strategies. The rapid advancements in AI, in particular, are expected to expedite those changes, shifting the power and capabilities from human-centric to machine. Management literature will thus need to change and adapt to the new landscape, revisiting the frameworks, theories and concepts that have dominated in the last two decades. Above, we have outlined several avenues that offer ample opportunity for future research, particularly related to the upper-echelon and corporate entrepreneurship settings. Yet the enormity of changes can translate to other valued avenues for research. The involvement of AI in technological advancements can intensify the production of innovations and, at the same time, devalue them owing to the ease of reengineering. The advancement in digitalization and AI automation can also foster new organizational structures, designs and routines and require humans to adapt and find new ways they can contribute to the creation of value in the organization. Future research can begin by outlining the mechanisms and factors that will be needed to create and sustain competitive advantage and examine how the upper echelon prepares to face the new challenges by developing new skills and devising mechanisms to compete in a competitive, transparent environment.

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New Directions in Fintech and Digital Finance

Paul P. Momtaz and Silvio Vismara

Fintech, a portmanteau of financial technology, refers to the use of digital technology to innovate existing and create new business models in finance. The rapid evolution of fintech is reshaping the global financial landscape. This section synthesizes current debates and points to new research directions in four key fintech domains that have gained significant attention in the business and management literature: (1) sustainable finance and environmental, social and governance (ESG), (2) artificial intelligence and machine learning, (3) blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies and (4) digital transformation of finance. These areas represent central themes that are shaping the future of the financial services industry and warrant further academic investigation and managerial consideration.

Sustainable finance and ESG

ESG criteria are increasingly integral to fintech (Billio, Murgia and Vismara, 2024). By definition, fintech's digital services often are (1) more protective of the environment because of the lack of energy-consuming physical services (Mansouri and Momtaz, 2022), (2) socially more equitable because they may help democratize financial markets (Butticè and Vismara, 2022) and (3) governance-improving through more efficient 'voice and exit' mechanisms (Yermack, 2017). The integration of fintech into sustainable finance is grounded in *stakeholder* value-maximization principles. Fintech enables the implementation of ESG criteria through digital platforms that facilitate transparent and efficient reporting, monitoring and verification of sustainability metrics (Cumming *et al.*, 2024). The development of green fintech solutions, such as AI-driven ESG scoring systems and blockchain-based supply chain tracking, underscores how technology can enhance the accountability and impact of sustainable investments (Mansouri and Momtaz, 2022).

However, the environmental impact of digital technologies, including the significant carbon footprints of data centres and cryptocurrency mining, has raised concerns about the true sustainability of these platforms (Mora *et al.*, 2018). While fintech's shift towards digital services may reduce certain resource-intensive activities, the proliferation of new technologies has also contributed to increased energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in the finance industry (Masanet *et al.*, 2020). As such, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the environmental trade-offs and considerations in the digital transformation of finance. How can fintech platforms and digital finance solutions be designed and deployed in a more environmentally sustainable manner, addressing issues such as energy efficiency, renewable energy usage and circular economy principles? How can fintech companies and financial institutions effectively integrate ESG considerations into their digital offerings and operations, ensuring that the promise of sustainable finance is not undermined by the environmental costs of technological transformation? Addressing these research questions is central to understanding and eventually mitigating the environmental implications of fintech.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning in fintech

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are influencing financial services and markets through their applications in predictive analytics, personalized financial services and ethical considerations. Theoretically, AI/ML enhances the accuracy and efficiency of financial models by leveraging large datasets, novel or previously unused (e.g. alternative) data and sophisticated algorithms. AI-facilitated predictive analytics improve the precision in financial forecasting and risk management, for example, by implementing AI/ML techniques on social media data to predict financial performance (Moro, Radić and Truong, 2024; Nguyen *et al.*, 2024). AI-driven personalized financial services increase customer–product fit, offering interesting insights into the potential to reduce deadweight losses in financial services both on the customer and the producer side. The business and management literature has increasingly explored the implications of AI/ML in various organizational contexts, as discussed by Brown *et al.* (2024). However, the application of these technologies within the finance domain remains an underexplored area in need of further research. Some key questions for future investigation focus on how AI/ML-driven financial services can balance personalization and privacy concerns. As financial institutions leverage more customer data to tailor their offerings, what ethical and regulatory frameworks are needed to protect consumer interests? What are the long-term impacts of AI/ML on financial inclusion and access to finance, particularly for underserved or marginalized populations? Can these technologies help reduce financial discrimination or do they risk perpetuating or even exacerbating existing biases? What are the potential systemic risks associated with the increasing adoption of AI/ML in finance, and how can policymakers and regulators proactively address these challenges?

Exploring these research questions will help in understanding the transformative impact of AI/ML on the financial services industry and ensure that these technologies are developed and deployed in an ethical, equitable and sustainable manner. As the finance domain continues to evolve alongside advances in AI/ML, this area of inquiry represents an important frontier for both academic research and managerial practice.

Blockchain and cryptocurrencies

Blockchain technology offers a decentralized framework for financial services and may thus eliminate the need for intermediaries (Momtaz, 2021). Promises of blockchains include 'trustless' services and a dramatic reduction of transaction costs, while scalability and interoperability remain challenging (Lumineau, Wang and Schilke, 2021). Blockchain technology has revolutionized how startups acquire funding (Alexander and Dakos, 2024), how retail investors gain access to institutional investments (Drobetz *et al.*, 2024), and how financial institutions compete in a digital and decentralized world (Allen, Gu and Jagtiani, 2021). However, the adoption of blockchain and cryptocurrencies has also faced significant challenges and controversies. Concerns around regulatory compliance and illicit transactions have led to the discontinuation of blockchain projects in the finance sector (Hornuf *et al.*, 2024). How cryptocurrencies relate to more traditional equity and debt securities, contingency factors for the tokenization of organizational assets, the pros and cons of a public (tokenized) market for startups, and how a truly globally integrated financial market will reshape business remain a few of many interesting questions to explore in future work. Global collaborations in a digitally wired world open questions of global governance and international business literature (Harvey and Rabetti, 2024).

Digital transformation in finance

Digital transformation in finance involves integrating digital technologies to fundamentally alter the delivery and consumption of financial services (Browne *et al.*, 2024), for example, by the acquisition and integration of fintech startups into incumbent banks (Collevecchio *et al.*, 2024). The role of digital transformation in finance is multifaceted and interdisciplinary (Inceoglu, Vanacker and Vismara, 2024). At the most basic level, digital transformation revives debates on organizational change in the novel fintech context (Vu and Christian, 2024). For example, Collevecchio *et al.* (2024) explore contingency factors that determine whether traditional banks benefit from fintech acquisitions. At a macro-level, the digital transformation of financial services and financial market infrastructure leads to research opportunities pertaining to the equilibrium outcomes of such transformation; that is, do digitally transformed financial services reach more customers with better-tailored products at more discriminatory pricing? How do financial service providers' cost structures adjust to digital offerings and how is this related to the future of work? From an investment perspective, it is worth exploring whether digital transformation improves corporate investment efficiency, inter alia, through an improved allocation of financial resources (at better rates) and real-time performance controlling.

Concluding remarks

As the finance industry continues its digital transformation, some of the most promising and impactful research opportunities lie at the intersection of fintech, sustainability and ethical technology deployment. Exploring the long-term impacts of AI/ML on financial inclusion, access to finance and the mitigation of existing biases is crucial for ensuring that these technologies are developed equitably. The *British Journal of Management* is particularly well positioned to contribute to these pressing research agendas, which have significant implications for the future of the global financial system.

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