Introduction

Between Synthesis and Fieldwork: An Introduction to the Issue

Raffaella Montera[*]

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The preceding issue of Corporate Governance and Research & Development Studies was a Special Issue on the exploratory power of the qualitative approach and the case method. The present issue brings together six articles that differ in topic, method, and the kind of claim they make. Part of the earlier conversation nonetheless continues here: two articles are single-case studies, and a third reflects on ethnography and autoethnography as ways of studying organizations from within. The other three, by contrast, take stock of bodies of literature – on student entrepreneurship, on digital marketing and consumer behaviour, on organizational routines and scale-up – and ask what that literature has established and what it has left open.

These are two different ways of producing knowledge, and it is worth saying briefly why they sit well in the same issue. Review articles are no longer regarded as preliminary summaries. When conducted transparently they are studies in their own right (Kraus *et al.*, 2022), and their value lies less in cataloguing than in what they allow to be seen: the structure of a field, its dominant theories, the questions it keeps postponing (Paul and Criado, 2020; Post *et al.*, 2020; Mukherjee *et al.*, 2022). Case studies and fieldwork operate at the opposite distance. They give up breadth to stay close to a setting, and what they return are mechanisms and constructs that large samples seldom reveal (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Watson, 2011; Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The two modes depend on each other more than their separate

[*] Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Associated Professor of Business Management, Sapienza University of Rome. raffaella.montera@uniroma1.it. ID ORCID: 0000-0002-0530-7509

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literatures suggest: a review shows where a field has become repetitive, and close observation is often what supplies the next concept. The case for methodological pluralism in management research (Christofi *et al.*, 2024) is easier to make with examples in hand, and this issue offers six.

The issue opens with Confetto and Manta (this issue), who study how immersive technologies are put to work in the valorization of cultural heritage. Their case is Cultura Immersiva, an Italian start-up founded in 2021 that develops virtual reality experiences for cultural and tourism heritage. The evidence comes from in-depth interviews with its two founders, a computer engineer and a creative director with a long career in theatre, complemented by archival and media material and analysed abductively. The authors adopt a socio-technical lens and argue against reading immersion as a property of the hardware. In the case they describe, technology is kept deliberately "invisible" and subordinated to narrative structure and emotional pacing, so that immersive storytelling acts as a cognitive mediator that reduces the symbolic distance between heritage and less engaged audiences. On the theoretical side, the article reconceptualizes immersion as a situated process of experiential orchestration; it treats authenticity as a negotiated, practice-based outcome that sets boundaries on design, not as a fixed attribute of material objects; and it describes user participation as generative and only partly controllable. It also reads the friction between engineering and artistic logics as a source of innovation, which connects the study to research on hybrid organizing and institutional logics.

Cucari *et al.* (this issue) move from one firm to an entire research community. The Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), established in 2003, is a large international research project on student entrepreneurship, and the authors offer what they present as the first bibliometric review of the scholarship built on it. Using a hybrid design that combines performance analysis and science mapping with the tenets of a structured review, they analyse 117 Scopus-indexed articles and identify six thematic clusters: socio-demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial career paths; the entrepreneurial climate of higher education institutions; family business entrepreneurship; the multiplicity of contexts; personality traits and decision-making logics; country determinants and cross-cultural settings. The theoretical contribution is a map of the lenses on which this literature rests. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) dominates several clusters, and the authors regard the reliance on intention-based models as a constraint, since starting a business is often a long and non-linear undertaking. They propose to widen the repertoire – toward the resource-based view, contingency and evolutionary perspectives, and configurational methods – and to reconsider access to the GUESSS data, which their performance analysis suggests are used mainly by the survey's national delegates.

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With Rota *et al.* (this issue) the issue returns to the single case, and to a setting far from digital platforms: Terelle, a mountain village in the province of Frosinone, where the organic winery *Fra i Monti* was founded in 2018. The authors ask how entrepreneurship re-emerges where depopulation and industrialization have interrupted an agricultural tradition, and they answer by bringing family business theory into dialogue with business history. Applying the Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013), they introduce territorial memory – the place-specific knowledge, practices and identity narratives that survive a historical rupture in degraded form and can be mobilized again – as the concept that links socioemotional wealth (Gómez-Mejía *et al.*, 2007), familiness and stewardship (Davis *et al.*, 1997). Three propositions follow: that territorial memory may carry socioemotional wealth where no family firm pre-exists; that recovered heritage knowledge may constitute a familiness that is territorial instead of genealogical; and that a stewardship orientation yields a business model suited to the premium positioning of artisanal, place-based markets and ill-suited to volume growth. The founders are not relatives, and the theoretical move of the article lies there: "family-type" entrepreneurship is defined by behaviour and governance logic, not by kinship.

Bashang *et al.* (this issue) go back to synthesis, this time with a systematic review conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines. From 892 records retrieved across five databases, 48 empirical studies published between 2015 and September 2025 are retained and organized around five digital marketing strategies: social media marketing, content marketing, online advertising, e-commerce experience, and personalized marketing. The contribution of the review is a conceptual framework that brings together Social Proof Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the Technology Acceptance Model and Relationship Marketing Theory. In this framework the five strategies, increasingly supported by artificial intelligence and by augmented and virtual reality, influence consumer engagement, trust and purchase intention, which in turn build brand loyalty; demographic characteristics, platform type, cultural context, privacy concerns and ethical transparency act as moderators. The gaps the authors identify – evidence from non-Western markets, longitudinal designs, the ethics of AI-based personalization – turn the framework into a research agenda.

Piccolo *et al.* (this issue) take up a question that recent work on scaling has left open. Scaling has been conceptualized as a dynamic capability, and its vocabulary has been harmonized (Jansen *et al.*, 2023; Coviello *et al.*, 2024), but through which routines growth intent becomes repeatable delivery remains underspecified. The authors address the question with a theoretically informed integrative synthesis that combines a Scopus-based corpus (87 records retained out of 229) with 24 foundational works, building on the view of routines as sources of both stability and change (Feldman and Pentland,

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2003). They distinguish five routine families – coordination, replication, control and measurement, learning and search, and boundary routines – and follow their changing salience across four periods between 1990 and 2025, which they use as analytical markers and not as historical breaks. The resulting trigger-to-mechanism framework makes two theoretical points. The same routine family can turn from accelerator into constraint as execution conditions change; and execution capability is configurational, in that it rests on complementarities among families more than on the presence of any one of them. Five propositions translate the argument into an agenda for longitudinal and comparative research.

The issue closes with Torchia *et al.* (this issue), whose article is conceptual and methodological. It retraces the history of ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988) and autoethnography, and their uneven diffusion across the subfields of business and management, and then works through two diary-based vignettes: one ethnographic, set in a member-owned football club in Manchester, the other autoethnographic, set in an adult dance class in northern Italy. Both concern inclusion and exclusion. The authors make two contributions. They conceptualize ethnography and autoethnography as positions along a continuum of reflexive involvement, not as opposed methods, and they develop diary vignettes as analytical devices through which access, reflexivity, ethics, writing and theorizing become visible. One further point matters for the readers of this journal. Governance, in these pages, is not confined to boards, ownership models and formal rules; it includes the informal, embodied and relational practices through which participation and belonging are regulated.

The six articles do not share a single thesis but read side by side they show three lines of continuity.

The first concerns entrepreneurship, which four articles observe at different moments. Cucari *et al.* deal with intentions and nascent activity among students; Confetto and Manta with a start-up in its first years; Piccolo *et al.* with the passage from episodic entrepreneurial action to repeatable execution; Rota *et al.* with entrepreneurship that begins again where a tradition had been interrupted. Taken in this order, the articles show how much the explanatory vocabulary changes along the way: intention models at the start, professional logics and legitimacy in the young venture, routines at scale, memory and stewardship where the horizon is the long term. That intention-based models account for only part of the path is, incidentally, one of the conclusions that the GUESSS review reaches about its own field.

The second line concerns technology, which three articles treat as something to be organized and not merely adopted. In Confetto and Manta the technology is subordinated to narrative; in Bashang *et al.* the effects of AI-based personalization and of augmented and virtual reality depend on trust,

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privacy concerns and ethical transparency; in Piccolo *et al.* digital and platform contexts alter which routines become binding. One convergence is worth noting. The systematic review lists the opportunities of immersive technologies among the under-explored areas of digital marketing research, and a case study in the same issue observes one such technology in use.

The third line is the one closest to the identity of this journal. None of the six articles deals with boards or ownership structures in the conventional sense, yet governance recurs. Rota *et al.* describe a governance logic driven by stewardship among founders who are not kin. Torchia *et al.* set the participatory governance of a supporter-owned club beside the informal mechanisms that regulate access and legitimacy in a group with no formal decision-making structure. Piccolo *et al.* argue that boundary routines – alliance and ecosystem governance, regulatory engagement – become constitutive of execution capability. Bashang *et al.* place transparency in the use of data among the conditions of consumer trust. The introduction to the Special Issue observed that case research extends the study of governance beyond formal structures, to cognitive, relational and inter-organizational mechanisms. The articles collected here, with different methods, point in the same direction.

A last remark concerns method. The three syntheses end by asking for the kind of evidence that the three field-based articles provide. Cucari *et al.* call for mixed and configurational designs alongside survey-based hypothesis testing; Bashang *et al.* for longitudinal and cross-cultural evidence; Piccolo *et al.* for process data on how routines are enacted, transferred and reconfigured. In the other direction, the propositions that Rota *et al.* derive from one winery, and the mechanisms that Confetto and Manta describe in one start-up, are offered for examination in other settings. Neither kind of work completes itself. A miscellaneous issue makes this visible in a way that a thematic one, by design, cannot.

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