

## **Session Title**

What's So Special About Special Issues?

### **Abstract**

What do privilege, experiential learning in large classes, mental health and psychological well-being, the hidden curriculum of responsibility, improvising as the new normal, the senses, positive perspectives, COVID-19, and scholarly impact have in common? They have all been the topic of Special Issues in management education journals since the beginning of 2022. In this period, one-third of the issues published in Journal of Management Education (JME), Management Learning (ML), and Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE). The aim of this roundtable provocation is to engage our audience in discussion on the topics of Special Issues in management education. Are they a signpost to a field which is short on ideas? Or are they symbolic of one which is exploring new terrains? What does the number of Special Issues mean for publishing in management education? What might be the career implications of this trend?

### **Introduction**

There appears to be a trend in the leading management education journals towards publishing Special Issues. In the 27 editions of JME, ML, and AMLE which have been published since the beginning of 2022, nine (33 per cent) have been Special Issues. At time of writing this proposal, these journals have calls out for another four Special Issues. Each of the journals features on their websites invitations for potential Editors to submit Special Issue proposals. A fourth journal, Management Teaching Review (MTR), recently put out its first call for Special Issue proposals.

The current number of Special Issues across JME, ML, and AMLE appears to be in advance of what might once have been considered average. In 2008, only 26 per cent of the issues of the same three journals were Special Issues. In 2013, the figure had declined to only 20 per cent of the issues being considered Special. What these figures suggest is that, where 1 in 4 or 5 journal issues in management education were once dedicated to special topics, that number in the post-pandemic period is now 1 in 3. The intention of this roundtable provocation is to engage the audience in questions around what this trend means for management education. Is it something to be concerned by? Or is it a sign of a field which is intent on expanding its boundaries?

### **Theoretical Foundation / Implications**

While this trend towards Special Issues in management education appears to be picking up pace, there seems a corresponding lack of discussion around its implications. Importantly, the field of management education is yet to have a debate on Special Issues. However, a similar discussion has been pursued in the wider field of organisation studies. Priem (2006) found that in the 33 combined publishing years he examined for Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, and Organization Studies, that 15 years contained 30 per cent of more Special Issue pages. Priem's argument is that this high number of Special Issues squeezes out quality articles on other topics, and redirects scholars away from areas in which they may have already been researching and towards the focus of Special Issues. The latter issue is important, because Priem argues innovative and creative scholarship is most likely to be generated by individual scholars pursuing their own scholarship. In a follow-up piece defending Special Issues, Mowday (2006) argues for journals to pursue broader topics when defining their Special Issues and for issues which aim to rekindle interest in topics which may have fallen off the agenda.

It would seem important for management education to engage in similar debates over the proliferation of Special Issues in the field. Since publication of the Priem versus Mowday debate, there have been many shifts in the field of publishing. Scholarly journals are now almost entirely online, and face increasing competition from a range of non-traditional outlets such as podcasts, open access formats, and online newspaper-style blogs. It is worthwhile considering whether Special Issues contribute to the competitive positioning of traditional scholarly journals in the field of management education. Anecdotal reports also suggest the post COVID-19 period has also seen a decline in the number of manuscripts targeted at management education journals. Do Special Issues assist in addressing this issue, or do they contribute to it?

The intention of this session is to engage the audience in debate over Special Issues in management education journals.

### **Session Description**

There are three hosts of this roundtable provocation. All three have had Associate Editor experience at management education journals, one is a Co-Editor of a Special Issue, while another is currently pursuing a Special Issue proposal with one of the management education journals.

To set the scene, the session will begin by providing an overview on statistics establishing the trend towards Special Issues in Management Education. This session will include a game-style format designed to induce participation from the audience, including a competition between audience members to name topics in recent Special Issues.

The format will then include a section where audience members are encouraged to share their experiences with Special Issues. Topics will include:

- What is your recollection of Special Issues in recent editions of management education journals? Are you more likely or less likely to read a Special Issue than you would other regular journal editions?
- Do you regularly reference Special Issue papers in compiling your own research? Off the top of your head, what is the Special Issue paper you can best recall?
- Have you ever submitted a manuscript to a management education journal Special Issue?
- If you have not submitted a manuscript to a management education journal Special Issue, why not? What would induce you to submit to a Special Issue in the future?
- What has been your experience of bringing together manuscripts for Special Issues? Has it involved putting other projects aside? Or was it in your domain of relevant expertise?
- Have you ever reviewed manuscripts for a Special Issue? How did you find this experience, compared to reviewing regular manuscripts?

The session then breaks into a debate-style format. One of the hosts will set out the affirmative case for Special Issues, and one of the hosts will set out the negative case for Special Issues. The topic will be: That Special Issues in management education journals are better than regular issues. The third host will moderate this debate.

The affirmative and negative positions will be informed by the Priem (2006) and Mowday (2006) debate on Special Issues in the broader field of organisational studies. Consideration will also be given to evolving issues which might impact on Special Issues, including the development of Artificial Intelligence and the drop in manuscripts in the post-COVID period. Audience members will be invited to contribute their own thoughts, and to determine their own side in the debate.

The intention of the roundtable is to gather thoughts on the topics of Special Issues, take notes, and explore further scholarship on this issue. One potential outcome from such debate is an essay-style manuscript targeted at JME which discusses the trend towards Special Issues in management education and which charts a way forward for this type of scholarly contribution.

### **Session Timing**

- 0 – 5 minutes: host introduction and engagement with the audience
- 5 – 15 minutes: game style format with the audience on Special Issues on management education. How well do you know recently published Special Issue topics?
- 15 – 30 minutes: audience member experiences with Special Issues in management education journal
- 30 – 50 minutes: debate - that Special Issues in management education journals are better than regular issues
- 50 – 60 minutes: Notes and discussion on a way forward. How might we better progress Special Issues in management education journals?

### **References**

Mowday, R.T. (2006). If Special Issues of Journals Are Not So Special, Why Has Their Use Proliferated? *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(4), 389-393.

Priem, R.L. (2006). What Happens When Special Issues Just Aren't "Special" Anymore? *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(4), 383-388.