

EDITORIAL

Interdisciplinarity with Accountability: Advancing Management Theory by Demarginalizing the Knowledge Pipeline

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary research is increasingly positioned as a route to relevance and theoretical renewal in management scholarship, especially as grand challenges demand integration across domains, methods, and epistemic communities. Yet “interdisciplinarity” often becomes a label rather than a disciplined practice: integration can be superficial, while the knowledge and people most affected by the phenomena under study remain marginal to theory building. Building on recent editorial arguments about the promises and pitfalls of interdisciplinary theory development and on calls to demarginalize the production pipeline that defines what counts as legitimate knowledge, this editorial advances a program for accountable interdisciplinarity in management research. Accountable interdisciplinarity insists that integration work and inclusion work are inseparable: management theory advances when scholars combine lenses with rigor while also widening who participates in theorizing, what is treated as evidence, and which intellectual lineages are recognized. I propose a publication stance for Management Research Quarterly that treats the “knowledge pipeline” as an object of editorial design: it can be widened, made more permeable, and governed with explicit standards of transparency, attribution, and boundary-crossing collaboration.

KEYWORDS

interdisciplinarity; theory development; marginalization; knowledge production; epistemic justice; boundary work; management journals.

1 | INTRODUCTION: WHY MRQ NEEDS “ACCOUNTABLE INTERDISCIPLINARITY” NOW MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP FACES A DOUBLE DEMAND.

One demand is integration: the phenomena that matter (sustainability transitions, AI-enabled organizing, global supply chain volatility, demographic shifts, and geopolitical uncertainty) do not fit neatly inside single disciplinary boxes (Reinecke et al. 2024). The other demand is legitimacy: publics and practitioners increasingly challenge whether management research is not only rigorous, but also fair in whose problems it prioritizes, whose voices it hears, and whose knowledge it dignifies as

theory-relevant (Connell 2007, Santos 2014, Tsui 2004). These demands are often treated separately. Interdisciplinary research is framed as a methodological or intellectual challenge, while inclusion is framed as a normative or demographic challenge. This separation is itself a problem, because it hides a key mechanism: many integration failures are also inclusion failures, and vice versa.

Recent editorial work in the Academy of Management Journal clarifies what interdisciplinary research is and what it is not. Interdisciplinarity, in this view, is not the mere “application” of another discipline’s tools; it requires integrating perspectives to generate theory that advances management knowledge in its own right (Reinecke et al. 2024). At the same time, research on demarginalizing knowledge production highlights that some topics and communities remain peripheral not because they are theoretically uninteresting, but because academic pipelines privilege certain problems, methods, and reference groups (Chughtai et al. 2020). In management research, this pipeline effect shows up when the Global South becomes a “context” rather than a theorizing

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center (Connell 2007, Charman and Bahadori 2025), when postcolonial critiques are treated as optional add-ons (Said 1978), or when “indigenous” perspectives are praised rhetorically but remain structurally disadvantaged in publication and citation economies (Tsui 2004, Rodríguez-Escobar 2024).

Management Research Quarterly is well positioned to respond because its mission is not to police a narrow canon but to catalyze knowledge creation and exchange across communities of scholarship and practice (Desmarchelier 2024, Liu 2024, Lančarić 2025). MRQ can do something ambitious yet concrete: make accountable interdisciplinarity a recognizable editorial pathway, with clear expectations for how authors integrate lenses and how they widen the knowledge pipeline that feeds management theory.

2 | THE KNOWLEDGE PIPELINE PROBLEM: WHERE INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND MARGINALIZATION MEET

To see why “accountable interdisciplinarity” is necessary, consider the pipeline that turns lived problems into published theory. A great deal happens before the first manuscript draft: which phenomena are deemed worthy, which sites are accessible, which actors become “informants,” which literatures are considered legitimate antecedents, and which methods are treated as credible evidence. These are not neutral choices. They are boundary decisions shaped by institutions, career incentives, and disciplinary histories (Connell 2007, Bhambra 2014). Interdisciplinary research, at its best, is a boundary-crossing effort that combines languages, concepts, and methods to produce explanations with greater power than single-discipline accounts (Reinecke et al. 2024). But boundary-crossing is expensive. It demands time to learn, negotiate meaning, and build trust across communities. The editorial challenge is that under pressure to publish quickly, interdisciplinarity can become thin: authors borrow constructs without respecting their epistemic roots, or they stitch together concepts without a coherent causal logic (Okhuysen and Bonardi 2011, Reinecke et al. 2024). When this happens, interdisciplinarity functions as symbolic capital rather than as theory work. Meanwhile, marginalization operates through a different, often quieter mechanism: the pipeline filters out knowledge that does not “sound like” mainstream theory. Postcolonial and anti-colonial readings of management knowledge show how representations of the “Other” can reproduce colonial tropes even inside well-intentioned research, making certain regions and actors visible only through stereotyped frames (Nkomo 2011, Said 1978). Global inequality in knowledge production means that some scholars and sites (Ghrayche et al. 2025) are more readily recognized as sources of generalizable insight, while others are treated as deviations from a presumed norm (Connell 2007, Tsui 2004). The result is not only ethical discomfort; it is theoretical loss. Management theory becomes less capable of explaining organizing under varied institutional logics, resource constraints, and historical trajectories.

Accountable interdisciplinarity treats these issues as entangled. If management scholars want to integrate disciplines to address complex problems, they must also integrate epistemic communities, especially those positioned at the margins of dominant publication systems. Conversely, if scholars want to demarginalize management knowledge, they must be willing to cross boundaries of method and theory, because the most marginalized problems frequently demand plural evidence and hybrid frames (Chughtai et al. 2020, Santos 2014).

A simple way to make this argument operational is to treat interdisciplinary work as varying along two dimensions: the depth of integration across knowledge boundaries and the degree of demarginalization in the knowledge pipeline that the research enacts (see figure below). In the quadrant where integration and demarginalization are both high, theory development is most likely because the manuscript must do genuine translation and synthesis while also treating peripheral contexts, actors, and intellectual lineages as sources of conceptual innovation rather than as illustrative settings Reinecke et al. (2024), Connell (2007), Santos (2014). When demarginalization is high but integration is low, the work can still be valuable as an intervention in representation and agenda-setting, yet it risks being dismissed as “context-only” unless the author makes the causal mechanism portable and clarifies the boundary conditions under which the insight should travel (Tsui 2004, Okhuysen and Bonardi 2011). When integration is high but demarginalization is low, the manuscript may be technically impressive (combining lenses, data sources, or methods) while still reproducing the field’s default assumptions about whose knowledge counts as theory-generating and whose becomes mere empirical material (Bhambra 2014, Nkomo 2011). Finally, when both integration and demarginalization are low, interdisciplinarity becomes cosmetic and inclusion becomes performative, producing what might be called a “nice-to-have” paper: legible, but unlikely to generate durable theoretical movement or to widen the epistemic community of management scholarship (Chughtai et al. 2020, Reinecke et al. 2024).

3 | WHAT “ACCOUNTABLE INTERDISCIPLINARITY” REQUIRES

Accountable interdisciplinarity begins with a simple commitment: integration should not be purchased at the cost of epistemic extraction, and inclusion should not be reduced to symbolic gestures. To make this commitment actionable, we conceptualize accountability along two dimensions. The first distinguishes where accountability is enacted: some obligations are primarily fulfilled in the text (through how authors frame, theorize, define constructs, and credit intellectual lineages), whereas others are fulfilled in the process (through how research is designed, conducted, and governed, including collaboration and attribution practices). The second distinguishes what accountability safeguards: some obligations protect validity (the coherence and inferential strength of explanations and evidence), while others protect fairness (epistemic justice in whose knowledge is recognized and how partners and communities are

TABLE 1 Accountable Interdisciplinarity Matrix

	Low demarginalization	High demarginalization
Low integration	Interdisciplinarity is cosmetic; inclusion is performative. Limited likelihood of durable theoretical contribution.	Valuable agenda-setting and representation work, but may be dismissed as “context-only” unless the mechanism and boundary conditions are made portable.
High integration	Technically strong synthesis across disciplines, data, or methods, yet may reproduce default assumptions about whose knowledge counts as theory-generating.	Deep integration plus demarginalization forces genuine translation and new constructs, treating peripheral contexts and intellectual lineages as sources of conceptual innovation.

represented). Crossing these dimensions yields four intertwined forms of accountability (conceptual, methodological, relational, and epistemic) summarized in Table 2 below.

Conceptual accountability means that the rationale for combining lenses is explicit and non-trivial. Reinecke et al. (2024) emphasize that interdisciplinary research must articulate why a single discipline is insufficient and how integration generates added value for management theory. This implies specifying which constructs travel across boundaries, what changes in their meaning during travel, and why the combined explanation is more powerful. In other words, integration should produce not only more variables, but also clearer mechanisms. The warning from Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011) remains central: combining lenses is difficult because different theories carry different assumptions about causality, agency, and levels of analysis. Accountable interdisciplinarity therefore demands a disciplined handling of assumptions, consistent with problematization as a way to challenge what the field takes for granted (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011).

Methodological accountability means that interdisciplinary claims are matched by credible evidence and appropriate inference. Interdisciplinary research often invites plural methods, but pluralism is not permissiveness. Editorial guidance in AMJ has argued for strengthening theory–methods–data links and for widening the research methods repertoire without loosening standards of rigor (Bliese et al. 2024, Langley et al. 2023). Accountable interdisciplinarity aligns with this stance: it welcomes methodological hybridity when the design transparently connects data to claims. This includes careful attention to translation when data cross languages and administrative systems, because mis-translation is not only a technical issue but also a validity issue.

Relational accountability recognizes that interdisciplinary work is organized labor. It requires collaboration across communities, and collaboration requires governance: shared language, role clarity, and norms for attribution (Reinecke et al. 2024, Siedlok and Hibbert 2014). Knowledge brokerage research reminds us that innovation often occurs when actors recombine knowledge across boundaries (Hargadon 1998, Gruber et al. 2013). Yet brokerage can also become extraction if scholars treat partners—especially practitioners, communities, or scholars from less-resourced institutions—as “data providers” rather than co-producers of meaning. Accountable interdisciplinarity therefore insists on clarity about who contributed what, how collaboration was structured, and how benefits (including authorship and visibility) are distributed.

Epistemic accountability is the most demanding and the most important. It asks whether the pipeline that produced the manuscript recognizes diverse intellectual lineages and treats marginalized knowledge as theory-relevant rather than merely contextual. Calls to “decolonize” knowledge do not require abandoning Western theory; they require refusing its monopoly over universality (Bhambra 2014, Connell 2007, Santos 2014). In management research, this means citing and engaging scholarship from varied geographies and traditions when it is relevant, not as performative diversity but as a substantive resource for explanation. It also means being alert to representational harms and to the way categories can reproduce colonial images (Nkomo 2011, Said 1978, Lissillour 2021). Finally, epistemic accountability implies taking “indigenous research” seriously as a source of generalizable management knowledge, not only as “local insight” (Tsui 2004, Rodríguez-Escobar 2024).

4 | BOUNDARY WORK AS EDITORIAL DESIGN: MRQ'S ROLE

If accountable interdisciplinarity is a research stance, MRQ can support it through editorial boundary work. Boundary organization theory shows that entities operating between communities can remain credible on both sides by developing boundary objects, translation capacity, and dual accountability (Guston 2001, O'Mahony and Bechky 2008). Journals are boundary organizations in a strong sense: they mediate between research communities, methods, and audiences; they codify what counts as contribution; and they translate emerging problems into publishable forms. MRQ can therefore treat its editorial processes as a designed infrastructure for accountable interdisciplinarity.

The concept of boundary objects is particularly useful here. Boundary objects are standardized enough to coordinate across communities while flexible enough to adapt locally (Carlile 2002 2004, Lissillour and Sahut 2022). In publishing, boundary objects include review criteria, reporting standards, and genre conventions. MRQ can make accountable interdisciplinarity legible by specifying the boundary objects that authors can use to communicate across epistemic communities. For example, the journal can encourage authors to articulate their integration rationale, to map how constructs travel across disciplines, and to be explicit about translation and collaboration processes. None of this

TABLE 2 Accountability Matrix

	Enacted in the text (manuscript-level choices)	Enacted in the process (research practice & governance)
Validity safeguarded	Conceptual accountability: integration is necessary (not cosmetic); constructs travel with clarified meaning; the combined lens yields a coherent mechanism and boundary conditions.	Methodological accountability: design warrants the interdisciplinary claim; evidence and inference are transparent; translation/measurement choices are justified; rigor matches the complexity of the question.
Fairness safeguarded	Epistemic accountability: whose knowledge counts is made explicit; relevant intellectual lineages are credited; marginalized settings/communities are treated as theory-generating (not just illustrative); representations avoid extractive or colonial tropes.	Relational accountability: collaboration is governed fairly; roles and credit are transparent; partners are not treated as mere “data providers”; reciprocity and benefit-sharing are considered in how the project is organized.

requires lowering standards. On the contrary, it makes standards more visible and more fairly applicable across diverse research designs.

MRQ can also invest in editorial translation capacity. Translation is not merely communication; it is the ability to convert categories across domains into actionable routines (Carlile 2004). In publishing, translation capacity shows up when editors and reviewers can evaluate interdisciplinary manuscripts without forcing them into a single dominant template. It also shows up when reviewers are chosen not only for topical expertise but also for their ability to bridge methods and contexts. Interdisciplinary manuscripts often fail not because they are weak, but because they are evaluated through mismatched expectations.

Finally, MRQ can operationalize epistemic accountability by treating citation as part of theory building rather than as an afterthought. Citation practices are not neutral: they allocate recognition and shape what future scholars treat as canonical (Connell 2007, Bhambra 2014). Accountable interdisciplinarity invites authors to cite across boundaries with care, resisting extractive borrowing and acknowledging intellectual debts. Where relevant, it also invites engagement with scholarship that has historically been treated as peripheral to “mainstream” management theory.

5 | WHAT MRQ INVITES: MANUSCRIPTS THAT WIDEN THE PIPELINE WHILE STRENGTHENING THEORY

With this editorial, MRQ invites submissions that do two kinds of work at once: they advance management theory through interdisciplinary integration, and they demarginalize the knowledge pipeline by widening who and what contributes to theorizing. This invitation is intentionally broad, because accountable interdisciplinarity is not one method or one topic. It is a way of doing theory under conditions of complexity and inequality.

One promising direction concerns grand challenges and their uneven burdens. Research on sustainability, AI, and digital transformation is often interdisciplinary by necessity (Reinecke et al. 2024, von Krogh et al.

2023, Boyer 2024), yet it can reproduce center-periphery dynamics if it treats certain regions as laboratories rather than as sites of theory leadership. MRQ welcomes work that theorizes how organizations navigate these challenges in settings that are typically underrepresented in leading journals, and that uses those settings not as “exceptions” but as sources of conceptual innovation (Tsui 2004, Connell 2007).

A second direction concerns the organization of interdisciplinarity itself. Interdisciplinary work is often discussed as an individual virtue, but it is also a collective accomplishment shaped by incentives, identities, and institutional arrangements (Siedlok and Hibbert 2014, Reinecke et al. 2024). MRQ welcomes studies of how interdisciplinary teams build shared language, manage conflict, and govern attribution, including work that examines how power and hierarchy shape which disciplines and voices dominate integration (Lissillour 2024, Lissillour et al. 2023, Bahadori and Ramjawan 2025). Such work aligns with broader concerns about epistemic justice and cognitive inequality (Santos 2014).

A third direction concerns theory building with plural evidence. Calls to open research methods repertoires emphasize that methodological diversity can strengthen explanation when theory-data links are explicit (Langley et al. 2023, Bliese et al. 2024, Lissillour and Silva 2024). MRQ welcomes designs that combine qualitative and quantitative evidence, computational approaches with interpretive analysis, and archival sources with field engagement, especially when such designs enable researchers to capture mechanisms that single-method approaches systematically miss. This includes careful engagement with measurement and meaning across languages and institutions, where translation work becomes part of theorizing.

A fourth direction concerns representational politics and the moral economy of management knowledge. Postcolonial scholarship demonstrates that categories and narratives can reproduce colonial images, even in academic writing (Nkomo 2011, Said 1978, Jack and Westwood 2009, Charman and Bahadori 2025). MRQ welcomes manuscripts that identify how management concepts travel globally, how they change in translation, and how they can be reworked to avoid epistemic violence while retaining explanatory power. This is not a call for ideological conformity; it is a call for reflective rigor about how knowledge claims are produced and whose realities they render visible.

Across these directions, MRQ's editorial stance is that accountability is productive (Desmarchelier 2024, Liu 2024, Lančarić 2025). It does not constrain creativity; it makes creativity more reliable, more inclusive, and more consequential. Interdisciplinary research often promises impact, but impact is not only about topical relevance. It is also about whether theory is built from the full range of knowledge needed to explain organizing in a stratified world.

6 | CONCLUSION: INTERDISCIPLINARITY IS NOT ENOUGH WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Interdisciplinary research can deepen management theory when it is done with discipline: when the rationale for combining lenses is clear, when assumptions are handled explicitly, and when theory-methods-data links are strong (Okhuysen and Bonardi 2011, Reinecke et al. 2024, Bliese et al. 2024). Yet in an era where knowledge production is increasingly scrutinized, interdisciplinarity is not enough. The field also needs accountability for how knowledge pipelines marginalize certain problems, communities, and intellectual traditions (Chughtai et al. 2020, Connell 2007, Santos 2014, Tsui 2004). Accountable interdisciplinarity is offered here as a practical editorial and scholarly program. It treats journals as boundary organizations that can design the infrastructures that make rigorous integration and genuine inclusion more likely (Guston 2001, O'Mahony and Bechky 2008, Carlile 2004). For MRQ, the aspiration is straightforward: to publish research that not only crosses disciplinary boundaries, but also widens the epistemic community that management theory is built from. In doing so, we do not merely keep pace with changing research agendas; we improve the conditions under which management knowledge becomes both credible and broadly useful.

This special issue closes with four contributions that each illuminate, through different objects and methods, what it means to produce knowledge that travels across boundaries without losing rigor or responsibility. Uddin (2025)'s empirical article examines how taxpayers' lived encounters with tax administration and core public services (health, education, transport) shape perceived fairness and the acceptability of taxation. Based on a cross-sectional survey (about 180 individual taxpayers), the study documents concrete "hassles" (e.g., time-consuming procedures, informal payment demands, and perceived low quality of public services) and shows how these experiences feed a perceived misalignment between tax burdens and service quality—thereby speaking directly to debates on tax justice, equity, and tax morale in a lower-middle-income context.

Bonaglia and Rokpelnis (2025)'s managerial insight, Boundary organizations in transnational academic labor markets: Managerial insights from EURAXESS China and the Galileo Galilei Italian Institute, reframes two "boots-on-the-ground" intermediaries as boundary organizations that translate shifting EU–China cooperation conditions into workable institutional routines and individual career pathways. Using

document-based evidence and secondary sources, the article highlights dual accountability, scalable boundary objects (calls, mobility schemes, fellowships, information days), and translation mechanisms that turn policy into actionable practice, thus yielding a concrete design logic for university leaders, research offices, and HR managers operating under de-risking pressures, eligibility shifts, and heightened research-security concerns.

Nguyen (2025)'s article, Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Legal Practice: From Automation to Augmented Lawyering, analyzes how AI is reconfiguring legal work without reducing it to technological determinism. Centered on the French legal system, it shows how automation of routine tasks coexists with a shift toward human judgment, ethics, and strategic advisory work, while also detailing organizational changes inside law firms (governance structures, multidisciplinary teams, and AI management practices oriented to ethical compliance and data security). The article argues that the future of law is best understood as human-machine collaboration—"augmented lawyering"—anchored in professional values such as responsibility, trust, and justice.

Finally, Oboudi (2025)'s book review, *Services in Sport Management: Bridging Service Marketing Theory and Sport Practice*, assesses Ekaterina Glebova's pedagogically oriented synthesis of service management for sport organizations. The review highlights the book's structured progression from foundational service theories (e.g., service-dominant logic, the service-profit chain) to applied domains (7Ps, CRM, service quality, segmentation, value co-creation), and underlines its didactic strengths (exercises, self-assessments, and cases from major sport properties). It also identifies limits, especially the relative scarcity of empirical grounding and a predominantly Western case base, while positioning the volume as a useful conceptual toolkit for both teaching and practice.

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