



Call for Papers

Unravelling top managers: Who are they and do they really matter?

Guest Editors

Eric Davoine, University of Fribourg, Switzerland
Monika Hamori, IE Business School - IE University, Madrid, Spain
Stefan Schmid, ESCP Business School, Berlin, Germany

1. Short description

Top managers are said to be important for organizations. But who are they and do they really matter? With this call for papers, we invite the submission of innovative papers that challenge the status quo and represent the latest thinking on top managers in various types of organizations.

2. Purpose and objectives

Early ethnographic studies of general managers by Mintzberg (1973) or Kotter (1982) highlighted the importance of individual characteristics in the exercise of the managerial function, as well as in the complexity of interactions with their environment. Since then, top managers and upper echelons have become an interdisciplinary object of research at the crossroads of fields, such as governance, careers, and strategy (Hambrick, 2007; Koyuncu et al., 2017). Some research focuses on the personality, socialization, educational background, and career path of top managers in order to understand what legitimizes their access to positions of power, as well as to understand their resulting priorities, their cognitive representations of their strategic environment, and their impact on corporate performance (Campbell et al., 2023; Göbel et al., 2022; Hamori & Koyuncu, 2015; Hsu et al., 2013; Niemand et al., 2021; Schmid & Dauth, 2014). Studies on top management teams complement this work by highlighting the collective nature of the top manager's job and the impacts of diversity on strategy definition and performance (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005; Georgakakis et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2013; Krause et al., 2022; Nielsen, 2010; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2013). Finally, qualitative approaches such as “strategy-in-practice” or managerial activity research emphasize the complexity and limited rationality of managerial action in the construction and implementation of strategic decisions (Jarzabkowski & Paul Spee, 2009; Hendry et al., 2010; Raes et al., 2011; Tengblad, 2012). They also stress the importance of contextualizing managerial action (Hambrick & Quigley, 2014; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). These different approaches appear to be complementary, but are rarely the subject of an organized dialogue. With this Management Focus section, we would like to propose a space for dialogue for authors from different perspectives and different research traditions.

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Under the umbrella of “Unravelling top managers: Who are they and do they really matter?” and consistent with the *European Management Journal's* aims and scope, our Management Focus section invites innovative papers that challenge the status quo and represent the latest thinking on top managers. We envision this to happen in at least three ways:

- **Dialogue between different perspectives and fields:** We invite papers from disciplines beyond those that were traditionally the home of research on top managers, such as strategy or corporate governance: sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.
- **Comparisons across time and space:** We value papers that rely on data from various countries or geographies and represent cross-country, cross-cultural comparative approaches, longitudinal investigations or historical accounts.
- **Rarely studied contexts:** We appreciate studies on top managers and boards in contexts that have received only limited empirical attention: non-US firms, companies other than the S&P 1500 firms, non-listed firms, etc.

The *European Management Journal* is an especially appropriate home for these types of contributions. It is a generalist journal that has published numerous studies on top managers that use a variety of methodological approaches (Davoine & Ravasi, 2013; Diaz-Fernandez et al., 2015; Greve et al., 2009; Schmid & Altfeld, 2018; Van Veen & Marsman, 2008; Wilms et al., 2019).

3. Topics of interest

With this Management Focus section we invite papers that address research questions such as the following:

- What types of career paths or trajectories did executives take towards their top management and/or board positions? How have career paths changed over time? What types of differences are there in career paths in different parts of the world (e.g., Europe, USA, and Asia) and in different types of companies (e.g., listed firms, family firms, and start-ups)?
- How has the demographic composition of top management teams and/or boards changed? How does it differ across countries shaped by national socio-economic contexts such as cultural attributes or national legislation (e.g., gender quotas)?
- How have top management teams changed over time, also with respect to challenges in the environment (such as globalization, digitalization, or gender equality)?

- Who inhabits the positions below the CEO? In what ways are CEOs different from other C-level executives (such as CFOs, COOs, CMOs, and CTOs), with respect to their demographic attributes, career histories, and their impact on corporations? Do the answers to the above questions differ across different countries and over time?
- What kinds of human and social capital (e.g., experiences, skills, knowledge, and network ties) do top managers and board members possess? How does their human and social capital differ across countries, industries, and firms? How has it changed over time and how may it change in the future?
- (How) do top managers and board members shape firms, for instance in terms of strategy, structure, and culture?
- (How) do top managers and board members extend their influence beyond firms? How and in which way do they influence the economy or society at large?
- (How) do top managers and boards react to the grand challenges in society, such as sustainability and the fight against poverty or justice? How do top managers and board members decide and act in periods of geopolitical tensions?
- How do top managers and boards work together? What is the impact of diversity and variety in top management and boards (for instance on cooperation, strategy, and performance)?
- How do top managers relate to middle-management?

4. Types of papers

In line with our focus, we invite a variety of papers to be submitted:

- **Different disciplines:** Since top managers and boards have been studied within a variety of disciplines, we encourage not only management and business scholars (for instance in career studies, strategy, corporate governance, HR, and organization), but also scholars from other disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, business history, etc., to submit their work.
- **Variety of paradigms and theories:** We do not limit ourselves to a particular paradigm or theory. Hence, scholars can base their work on theories of all kinds (and also rooted in different paradigms).
- **Broad range of methods:** We are open to conceptual papers, literature reviews, quantitative studies, qualitative studies, mixed-methods studies, and replication work. In particular, we strongly encourage the submission of papers with comparative approaches.
- **New datasets:** For empirical papers, while we do not exclude classical datasets (such as S&P 1500 firms), we welcome in particular work based on data from under-studied contexts (non-listed firms, non-US firms, etc.)

5. Submission instructions and timeline

- The Management Focus section will be published at the end of 2026.
- To prepare a platform for papers to be developed for the Management Focus section, the following are planned: a) a track for EGOS 2025 in Athens, Greece, b) an EIASM Workshop on Strategic Human Resource Management in spring 2025 in Fribourg, Switzerland.
- Submission of papers must be completed by **31st of July 2025**.
- All submissions should respect the journal's general publication guidelines (see website) and be submitted electronically to <https://www.editorialmanager.com/eumj/Default.aspx> between the **1st and 31st of July 2025**. When submitting your manuscript please select the article type "**SI: Unravelling top managers**".
- Please direct any pre-submission questions to Eric Davoine (eric.davoine@unifr.ch), Monika Hamori (Monika.Hamori@ie.edu) or Stefan Schmid (sschmid@escp.eu).
- All submissions deemed suitable will be subject to a double-blind peer-review process.

- Revision rounds are planned for the period **September 2025 to August 2026**, with accepted papers appearing online in September 2026.

6. Aims and scope of the journal

The *European Management Journal (EMJ)* is a flagship scholarly journal, publishing internationally leading research across all areas of management. EMJ articles challenge the status quo through critically informed empirical and theoretical investigations and present the latest thinking and innovative research on major management topics, while still being accessible and interesting to non-specialists.

EMJ articles are characterized by their intellectual curiosity and diverse methodological approaches, which lead to contributions that impact profoundly on management theory and practice. We welcome interdisciplinary research that synthesizes distinct research traditions to shed new light on contemporary challenges in the broad domain of European business and management. Cross-cultural investigations addressing the challenges for European management scholarship and practice in dealing with global issues and contexts are strongly encouraged.

7. Brief CVs of guest editors

Eric Davoine is Professor of Human Resource Management at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. His research interests include comparative and historical approaches of top management careers, international career mobility, and HRM practices within MNCs. His articles have been published recently in *Business History*, *International Business Review*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, and *European Management Journal*.

Monika Hamori is Associate Professor of Human Resource Management at IE Business School (IE University), Madrid, Spain. Her research interests include managerial and executive career paths and career success. Her articles have been published in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Organization Science*, *Human Resource Management*, and *Harvard Business Review*, among others. She received her PhD from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Stefan Schmid is Full Professor of International Management and Strategic Management at the Berlin campus of ESCP Business School. His research encompasses top managers' internationalization, firms' internationalization strategies, and headquarters–subsidiary relationships in MNCs. He has published in journals such as *Journal of World Business*, *International Business Review*, *Management International Review*, *Journal of International Management*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *European Management Review*, and *European Management Journal*.

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