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### Media Review: Research Handbook of Responsible Management [Review of: O. Laasch, R. Suddaby, R.E. Freeman and D. Jamali (Eds.) (2020) Research Handbook of Responsible Management]

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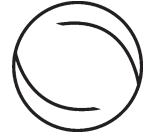
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## Media Reviews

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**Oliver Laasch, Roy Suddaby, R. Edward Freeman and Dima Jamali (Eds.)**  
**Research Handbook of Responsible Management**  
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2020

**Reviewed by:** Arno Kourula , *University of Amsterdam Business School, The Netherlands* & Pushpika Vishwanathan , *University of Amsterdam Business School, The Netherlands*

The *Research Handbook of Responsible Management* is a veritable treasure trove of insights. It can be considered a definitive guide to the broad topics within the field of responsible management and closely related fields. For organizational scholars, it presents insightful applications of key organization and management theories within the context of ethics, responsibility and sustainability. For researchers in responsible management and related fields, it offers at least a few perspectives that you may not have considered before. For doctoral students, it provides an invaluable who's who and what's what guide. The handbook's novelty is in putting the manager centre stage and identifying three themes that transcend theoretical domains (ethics, responsibility, sustainability), as well as levels of analysis (individual, job, group, organization, occupation, planet): (1) praxis, practices and processes; (2) learning, change and innovation, and (3) alternative management frameworks. In this review, we aim to critically reflect on the book's contributions. While it is difficult to think of what such an extensive handbook might have missed, we humbly revisit some directions for future research.

Corporate sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), business ethics. . . A beloved child has many names, one might say. In turn, responsible management is defined as managerial practices that integrate and assume 'responsibility for the triple bottom line (sustainability), stakeholder value (responsibility) and moral dilemmas (ethics)' (Laasch & Conaway, 2015, p. 25; as cited in Constantinescu & Kaptein, 2020). Thus, this concept essentially brings business ethics, CSR and corporate sustainability together at the manager level. This is a helpful perspective because scholars often tend to be preoccupied with differentiating these fields by disentangling their theoretical underpinnings and identifying their boundaries. However, when one considers the predictions and recommendations from these fields to everyday managerial practice, they significantly overlap. The concept of responsible management helps us to focus on these overlapping issues. At the same time, responsible management is described as emerging and new, but this runs the risk of becoming the proverbial old wine in new bottles. As the editors point out, further construct clarity is needed as the term otherwise becomes an empty signifier meaning everything and anything you want it to mean. Particularly important is the explanation of its components emerging from philosophy and psychology (ethics), management (responsibility) and environmental and policy studies (sustainability).

The monumental book is divided into eight parts: setting the stage, iconic views, management frameworks, glocal and spiritual perspectives, conceptualizing process and practices, learning and development, innovation and change, and engaged research. Part I commences with an introductory chapter that provides an excellent lay of the land through identifying a range of domains, spheres and themes. After the editors' introduction, the handbook starts boldly with a critical reflection on the philosophical foundations of whether management can ever be responsible, and discusses alternative forms of organizing. The subsequent chapter then offers a veritable potluck of perspectives, paving the way for part II: interview-style reflections on responsible management by icons in management (Mintzberg, Carroll, Suddaby, Adler and Freeman). As the backgrounds are so diverse and the discussion moves across individual, organizational and institutional levels of analysis, some level of talking past each other is to be expected, but this 'iconic' section is still particularly insightful. Part III covers dominant management frame(work)s, touching upon sustainability, leadership, ethics, governance, humanism and bio-inspiration. While each chapter of this part is strong in itself, it is the connections that offer room for novel contributions. In particular, the tensions between the last two more recently introduced (anthropocentric and biocentric) perspectives provide fruitful ground for theorizing. Part IV on glocal and spiritual perspectives offers a fascinating take on different local understandings of responsible management. Due to the space limitations of such a book, the reader is only given a somewhat superficial glance at an entire world of different ways to understand the topic at hand. While some lack of critical reflection of the Western origins of the mainstream responsible management discourse can be perceived, it is refreshing that for instance German, Swiss and United States perspectives are taken up as seemingly special cases. Part V on conceptualizing process and practices is novel and particularly insightful for organizational scholars. The chapters included in this section inspire future research to consider the individual level of analysis, a practice-based lens, organizational aesthetics, institutional pluralism, the paradox approach, the communicative constitution of organizations, and collective memory as avenues to further refine our understanding of responsible management. Part VI continues to draw from the practice perspective with a focus specifically on learning and development by the manager. It identifies the need for agility and practical judgement, unlearning as a way to make managers more responsible, and the competency to engage in normative deliberation and moral agency as part of daily managerial practice. Part VII is on innovation and change. Since responsible management has a transformative agenda, some chapters in this section focus on specific innovative management practices and approaches (such as whistleblowing and business model innovations), some provide broad overviews of management of innovation or social innovation in general, while others focus on more comprehensive management innovations (through responsible job crafting, institutional work, and memes and stories). In this part, a new metanarrative for management is articulated. The book ends like every book, documentary or talk on responsibility and sustainability should: on what you (dear reader) should do. This final part, part VIII, is nonetheless much more reflective than your typical sustainability documentary. It starts with a critical management studies take and ends on, not an optimistic view of the future, but a reflective perspective on learning from the past.

We think the main contribution and novelty of this handbook lies in its focus on managers, and as a result, its ability to connect different levels of analysis. The manager leads a team, a department, or an organization and hence represents an important link between the individual and the organization. The diverse authors that have contributed to the book's content identify inspiring and novel directions to explore: (1) the competencies and skills of responsible managers, (2) the practices and process adopted by responsible managers, and (3) alternative cultural and spiritual perspective for managerial frameworks. Rather than offering definitive answers to these questions, the various chapters provide readers with a brief introduction to a specific theoretical lens, concept or

context which may inform and inspire readers' own research agendas. Ultimately, the handbook is a call to arms for more research on responsible management. The book examines and demonstrates why and how managers should be human, ethical, responsible, sustainable and even biocentric. Nonetheless, these normative aspirations are fraught with tensions. The action lies between the levels of analysis, disciplines and themes. The next stage after this integrative task of bringing all the perspectives together is to transcend them, constantly revisiting them in a reflective and cyclical process.

We offer four reflections on the directions proposed by the handbook. These are related to identity, context, impact and the future. First, it is interesting to reflect on intersectionality and the different identities that we all have. As work is changing, employee welfare and purpose becomes redefined. We can move from the 9 to 5 manager to understanding the whole person – a trend that brings its own challenges and new research agendas (Girschik, Svystunova, & Lysova, 2020). Several handbook chapter authors such as Adler, Mintzberg and Pirson touch upon such themes and the general aim of moving back from the caped heroic leader to the mundane middle manager is a worthy one.

Second, context matters. The handbook highlights some contexts, especially those that are cultural and national. However, other issues contexts are worthy of further exploration (see Hamann et al., 2020). These include the power and politics or different institutional contexts. The industry context remains underexplored and could have offered interesting insights and boundaries for (ir)responsible management. In terms of organizational forms, different types of organizations do occasionally come up, but the implicit ideal organizational form is still in many parts of the book the large multinational company. Within companies and interpersonal relations, the organizational and situational contexts are very important in determining (ir)responsible behaviour. Nonetheless, this core element of business ethics could still have been expanded on.

The third important area of responsible management is impact, excellently reviewed in the chapter by Seelos and Mair. Over the past couple of decades, we have moved from an ethics and responsibility discourse focused on law and rules (e.g. a compulsory bachelor course titled Business Law and Ethics focusing on a compliance perspective) to a broader linkage of ethics and responsibility to individual and organizational purpose and sustainability (with strong innovation and imagination elements and almost religious undertones). Similarly, the book frames responsible management rather positively, allowing us to loosen the shackles of having to prove financial profitability or debate the difference between voluntary and mandatory responsibility. Now we speak of impact (see Barnett, Henriques, & Husted, 2020). Then the question arises: How far along are we as a field and in practice? Is this an ideal state or can we measure the state of responsible management? We have several measures of increased adoption and implementation available at the organizational level, such as sustainability reporting or sustainable investment criteria, but there is still a lot of work to be done to show how a responsible manager or responsible management at the aggregate level moves the needle, for instance on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Fourth and finally, we were surprised by the lack of future perspectives. While the future of management is typically depicted as a world of artificial intelligence and flexible meanings of (digital) work (see Fleming, 2019; Trittin-Ulbrich, Scherer, Munro, & Whelan, 2021), the handbook remains somewhat silent about these developments. This goes to show that a lot of work remains to define the future of responsible management. The handbook calls for responsible management to become normal in the sense that the 'responsible' qualifier could be dropped. This is likely to happen. However, it is the 'management' part of the equation that is likely to change dramatically in the future. For now, the editors have provided a fascinating integrative compilation of previously fragmented perspectives. This is a great service to the field and most chapters include

some appealing multilevel elements. This handbook will prove invaluable to scholars in the field and anyone who wants a comprehensive view of what is responsible management.

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### Antonio Strati

#### Organizational Theory and Aesthetic Philosophies

London: Routledge, 2019. 192 pp.

**Reviewed by:** Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, *Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden*

### *Dr. Strati meets Mr. Antonio: A social sciences aesthetic comes home to philosophy*

Antonio Strati's book *Organizational Theory and Aesthetic Philosophies* adds considerably to his earlier contribution in *Aesthetics and Organization* (Sage, 1999) by digging more deeply into the two words *theory* and *philosophies*.

Every chapter opens with an image carefully edited by the author and simply labelled 'interludes' – perhaps to distinguish them from relaxing intermezzos – providing tonus and energy to the book. This gives the text an almost catalogue-like format, albeit a catalogue raisonné inspired by the black-and-white interruptions to the written word. To Strati fans recalling his previous careful distancing from art and artistry, this approach may seem curious. Had they been reading Antonio incorrectly? True, he had never been preoccupied with the official 'heritage art' institutionalized by nations or corporations to control cultural policy. And certainly, Antonio is not known for deconstructing the strategies by which objects or images end up in museums of fine art or in the luxury collections of creative industries. He is neither shocked nor puzzled when pieces of art fetch insane auction prizes or become financially block-chained by Non-Fungible Tokens, nor does he spill any