

## Management research and COVID-19: a quick response for action in Iberoamerica

“Every disaster movie starts with someone ignoring a scientist”

Popular proclamation observed in several demonstrations around the world

“Let’s be clear: we knew, or should have known, that something like COVID-19 was going to happen”

Paul Krugman

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I am taking the license to cite textually an excerpt of an introduction of a manuscript written by Chen and colleagues published in the *Clinical Microbiology Reviews*. This journal is ranked #1 out of 516 in Medicine: Public Health, Environmental and Occupational Health by Scopus© and ranked #2 Out of 123 Microbiology Journals by Clarivate Web of Science©:

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) corona virus (SARS-CoV) is a novel virus that caused the first major pandemic of the new millennium. The rapid economic growth in southern China has led to an increasing demand for animal proteins including those from exotic game food animals such as civets. Large numbers and varieties of these wild game mammals in overcrowded cages and the lack of bio-security measures in wet markets allowed the jumping of this novel virus from animals to human. Its capacity for human-to-human transmission, the lack of awareness in hospital infection control, and international air travel facilitated the rapid global dissemination of this agent.

What is interesting about Cheng’s *et al.* introduction beyond a clear description of the inception of a novel corona virus? Cheng *et al.* was original published on 2007 describing a situation from 2003! The introduction of the paper ends with this statement:

The small reemergence of SARS in late 2003 after the resumption of the wildlife market in southern China and the recent discovery of a very similar virus in horseshoe bats, bat SARS-CoV, suggested that SARS *can return* if conditions are fit for the introduction, mutation, amplification, and transmission of this dangerous virus (Cheng *et al.*, 2007, p. 660).

So, 17 years later SARS-CoV-2, a novel corona virus that cause COVID-19 disease emerge in a similar way:

Although early studies reported a link between a single local fish and wild animal market and most cases of infection, indicating possible animal-to-human transmission, studies have increasingly demonstrated human-to-human transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through droplets or direct contact (Lai *et al.*, 2020).

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization, WHO, declared the COVID-19 outbreak as the sixth public health emergency of international concern after 2003 SARS-CoV crisis: H1N1 (2009), polio (2014), Ebola in West Africa (2014), Zika (2016) and Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2019). These outbreaks were warning signs and reminders of could unfold unless governments around the world would take effective action. Health workers, governments and the general public would have to cooperate globally to prevent a quick and more dangerous spread (Yoo, 2020). Just two months later on March 11, 2020, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus WHO Director-General announced that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). We know the rest of the story.

After this scientific-base evidence of corona viruses consequences (of any kind of them), my reflection is precisely about the relevance of science. We were neglected, not listening to



many scientific voices that forecasting the current situation. As Thomas A. Garrett, Assistant Vice President and Economist Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, stated: “Given our highly mobile and connected society, any future influenza pandemic is likely to be more severe in its reach, and perhaps in its virulence, than the 1918 influenza despite improvements in health care over the past 90 years. Perhaps *lessons learned from the past can help mitigate the severity of any future pandemic*” (Garrett, 2007, p. 22).

We need to get back to science and learn from it. Not only research conducted on medicine and health sciences, more relevant today than ever, but also on humanities, social sciences and, multi and transdisciplinary approaches. With this objective, the editorial team of *Management Research* took the decision to join several scientific voices and provide, from a regional point of view, fresh and actionable management research (Wagstaff and Amorós, 2020). We also follow the commitment of our editorial house, Emerald, to help in the dissemination of timely and relevant findings about COVID-19 that will benefit all of society [1]. As vital as the medical and hard sciences research, social sciences research is vital to the prevention, management and understanding of the wider societal challenges imposed by COVID-19. Our goal with the current special issue “*Management Research and COVID-19: A quick response for action in Iberoamerica*” is to contribute with knowledge that help mitigate the several organizational problems in our region.

### Papers in this special issue

Our special issue begins with the manuscript “Strategic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Pacific Alliance countries” by Vanina Vivas and Manuel Villar. This paper makes a macro approach analyzing government’s responses to COVID-19 in the four Latin American Pacific Alliance countries: Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Vivas and Villar (2020, this issue) identify some of the most relevant government-led responses since the first positive COVID-19 case reported in these countries. They elaborate around four strategies: testing and diagnostic, macro-prudential, labor and social support strategies. In their analyses and conclusions, the authors compare these different strategies (and their limitations) making a very relevant contribution to understanding the active and potential measures that could mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in some of the largest economies in Latin America.

The second manuscript by Kashyap and Raghuvanshi (2020, this issue) “A preliminary study on exploring the critical success factors for developing COVID-19 preventive strategy with an economy-centric approach,” makes an interesting empirical exercise to determine the most relevant critical success factors, CSF, for preparing a preventive strategy to overcome the slowdown caused by the lockdown after the COVID-19 outbreak. As the authors state “This study will find its relevance for effectively channelizing the limited resources toward minimizing the effect of COVID-19 epidemic on business activities” (Kashyap and Raghuvanshi, 2020). This article identify a set of 20 key factors, making an extended literature review about recent diseases and the management of crisis situations. Next, the authors perform a fuzzy decision-making trial and evaluation laboratory, DEMATEL, methodology for identifying the most relevant CSFs. They identify six CSFs: “effective communication”, “social distancing”, “adopting new technology”, “modify the rules and regulation at workplace”, “sealing the borders of the territory” and “strong leadership and government control”. These CSFs are analyzed and contrasted with others not selected by DEMATEL, building a very rich discussion with ample implications for Iberoamerican countries.

After these two, more general macro-approach articles, the third manuscript of the special issue moves to an individual-level study. Fernanda Wagstaff, Erica Salvaj and Sarah Villanueva try to respond a very relevant questions:

- Q1. What are the characteristics of champions facing wicked problem like COVID-19 disease?
- Q2. What dimensions explain these characteristics?
- Q3. How do these individuals enact their role?
- Q4. How do their roles as champions facing COVID-19 inform the characteristics of champions of other societal wicked problems?

Using the conceptualization of wicked problems, their paper “Champions in the time of COVID-19: tracing paths to recovery in Ibero-America” ([Wagstaff et al., 2020](#) this issue) analyze the case of Ximena Aguilera, a prominent Chilean epidemiologist, as an exemplar of a champion in times of COVID-19 in Ibero-America. Dr Aguilera has a vast experience dealing with previous pandemic outbreaks. The authors build an emergent theory, which involves three key emergent aggregate dimensions that characterize Aguilera’s championship. The three dimensions are depth of embracement, scope of embracement and leverage of embracement. The discussion of this interesting case-based research provides both relevant implications for theory and tangible solutions to wicked problems such as COVID-19.

The four manuscript “Stress, myths, effects upon arrival of COVID-19 and remote work” by [Madero et al. \(2020\)](#), this issue) makes a very interesting quantitative study in Mexico. The authors performed a survey to collect information about the perceptions of the impact that COVID-19 could have on the Mexican work environment and the relationship with isolation and remote work. One relevant characteristic of this study is that the data collection was parallel to the time in which WHO declared the pandemic (March 7 to 15, 2020), a time in which only a few organizations in Mexico started to design strategies to manage their work force as a response to COVID-19. This exploratory research shows several negative but also positive externalities that many organization are facing in relation to their workforce. The contributions of this work have important implications not only for academics but also for managers of companies, in particular human resources management that can support the growth and development of their workers with the goal of achieving well-being in the workplace.

In the last manuscript of this special issue, Herman Aguinis, Isabel Villamor and Kelly Gabriel analyzed a very relevant topic: the importance of the behavioral perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its relationship with the current pandemic contingency. In their manuscript “Understanding Employee Responses to COVID-19: A Behavioral Corporate Social Responsibility Perspective” [Aguinis et al. \(2020a\)](#), this issue) make a critical review and synthesis of the recent literature to address the question about why a behavioral perspective could be useful and necessary in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, by relying on theories and empirical findings from the fields of organizational behavior, human resource management and others that focus on the individual and team levels of analysis. The authors highlight the relevance of research focused on how firms can do good and do well, specially understanding the types of CSR policies and actions that many firms are developing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main contributions of this work is precisely a description of how conducting research specifically in Latin America ([Aguinis et al., 2020b](#)) about CSR would be particularly advantageous. These future research directions include human resources practices in response to COVID-19, bridging the micro (leadership) and macro (firm level) divide, measuring CSR’s impact on stakeholders outside the firm, the effects of CSR programs in reaction to COVID-19, indicators of employee resistance to CSR, social enterprises and blended social

and economic value creation, hybrid public-private collaborations and the relevance of understanding and helping vulnerable populations through social inclusiveness. The paper concludes with important implications for organizational practices and policymakers.

A quick response for action in Iberoamerica

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has arrived at the wrong time, as crises often do (Wyplosz, 2020). Iberoamerica faced social, economic, environmental and political problems before the wake of COVID-19. With different degrees of complexity, Spain, Portugal, Latin America and also the large Latino community in United States have been facing several wicked problems as Wagstaff et al. (2020) defined. Iberoamerica experienced a complicated year in 2019. Some few examples include, but are not limited to, political issues in Spain, social demonstrations and strikes in Chile, zero economic grow in Mexico, radical change of government (again) in Argentina, accumulated socio-political tension in Brazil and Colombia and violence and migration from Central America. Therefore, the scenario prepandemic was not ideal, characterized by weak institutional environment and state fragility (Amorós et al., 2019). COVID-19 accentuated many of these weakness in the region. Just for exemplify the magnitude of the crisis, Figure 1 show 2019 and 2020 GDP forecast in a single and double hit of COVID-19 in selected economies of the region.

My invitation is to follow the diverse voices that monitor the evolution of the crisis. With accurate analyses, relevant information, precise diagnosis and clear action plans, we can find a path for recovery. Some examples are the informs from Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations, OECD, etc. (see further readings). Also, a personal suggestion for further read are the edited series by the Centre for Economic Policy Research, CEPR, UK. Key actors of the region, including scholars, should have a prominent role in the social, economic and business recovering of our countries. And again, we should give science the relevant place that needs to have at this very crucial moment in time.

EGADE Business School at Tecnológico de Monterrey recently presented the *Decalogue for the Economic and Business Refounding of Mexico*. This decalogue emphasizes that the need for new businesses and management paradigms to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

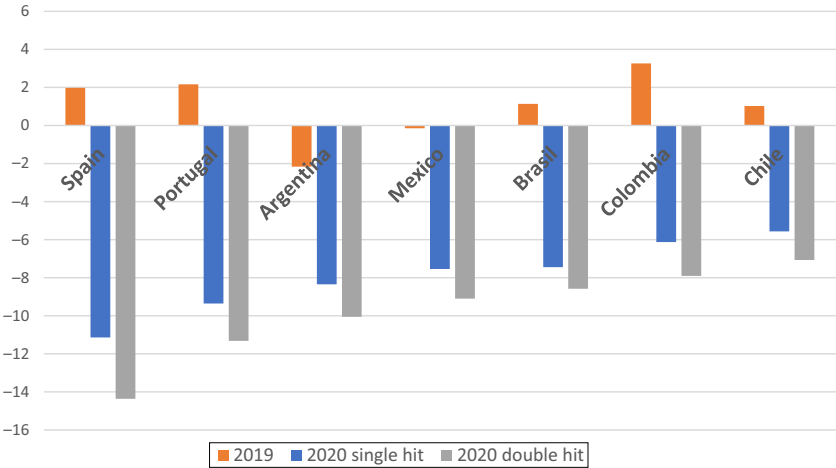


Figure 1.  
Real GDP 2020  
Forecast Annual  
Growth Rate (%) vs  
2019

Source: OECD

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This guide highlight key aspects that could be useful to all Iberoamerican countries, not only Mexico. So, my last license for closing this special issue editorial is summarizing it: Guest editorial

- *Develop a more conscious business models.* Firms and organizations should forget current economic models that only benefit the shareholder and instead, prioritize business strategies that incorporate sustainable production and actively participate in entrepreneurship and social innovation.
- *Build resilient societies and organizations.* The shock caused by COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of our current economic systems. It is urgent to establish and implement guidelines for a more just and sustainable future for all.
- *Establish the entrepreneurial ecosystem as the core of recovery.* The pandemic has created opportunities that many entrepreneurs have been able to capture. It is necessary to consolidate innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the region in which companies, universities, research centers and public sector participate as poles of attraction for talent.
- *Leave no one behind: invest in development, education and opportunity generation.* As in previous crises, the most vulnerable populations suffer the effects of the COVID-19 crisis more acutely. The revitalization of the economy must go hand-in-hand with creating opportunities for vulnerable communities through public-private investment and education.
- *Take a closer look at opportunities for a new trade globalization and regionalization scheme.* The new reality incorporates a brake regarding globalization and the maintenance of global supply chains, which configures a new map of opportunities. This opportunity involves the exploration of new regional agreements, especially in Latin America.
- *Embrace digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.* COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency of having programs that accelerate the digital transformation of any kind of organization and incorporate better e-commerce tools and support mechanisms for proximity logistics for local firms.
- *Leverage economic recovery through sustainability and innovation.* There is an opportunity to redefine what type of companies and sectors will receive investment, how the economy will be reactivated, directing growth toward a fairer, more inclusive, responsible, sustainable and competitive model. We need to emphasize in the United Nations' sustainable development goals.
- *Drive talent in a connected educational system.* Aligning universities and training agents with the new economy and the new technological contexts must be a priority to enhance their impact on the development and competitiveness of the country. There is a unique opportunity for the academic community in the region to strengthen cooperation and relationships to create relevant knowledge based on our regional necessities.
- *Drive global governance and multilateralism.* To face the challenges of the future, a multilateral governance system is needed that transcends the needs and capacities of a single institution or interest group, that cares about the common interest, and that incorporates the capacities of diverse groups.
- *Forge collaborative, transparent leadership.* We need leaders who can think strategically and communicate effectively but also who go beyond words and act according to goals and with the decision to face the challenges of an unknown world that must be reinvented and rebuilt.

I strongly believe that all the manuscripts in this special issue of *Management Research* are well aligned with the previous objectives and provide a substantial contribution to making our region a better place to live.

**José Ernesto Amorós**

*EGADE Business School, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City, Mexico and  
School of Business and Economics, Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile*

#### Note

1. For Emerald COVID-19 resources, available at: [www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/topics/coronavirus](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/topics/coronavirus), COVID-19 Emerald Open Research Collections see: <https://emeraldopenresearch.com/collections/coronavirus>

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### Further reading

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