Editorial

# Crafting impactful papers: Expectations and recommendations for Business and management articles

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces *Heliyon's* Business and Management Section, established in 2023 as a platform committed to maintaining rigorous ethical and scientific publishing standards within the field. Prioritizing scientific correctness and technical soundness over mere novelty, it encompasses a wide range of research domains, encouraging contributions from scholars across diverse backgrounds. Within this guide, we provide insights into the process of preparing effective papers and offer constructive guidelines for the reviewing process. Authors will find valuable tools to align their work with the journal's expectations, incorporating current literature to enhance the probability of successful publication. Both aspiring authors and reviewers will benefit from this resource, which emphasizes academic and professional growth. By promoting collaboration and upholding high-quality standards, we aim to fortify the scholarly publishing community and advance knowledge in the field of business and management.

## 1. Introduction

*Heliyon*, an all-science open-access journal, is dedicated to upholding ethical and scientific publishing standards. Within *Heliyon*, we proudly present the Section of Business and Management—an exclusive Section committed to high-quality research in the field. Established in 2023, this Section is led by a diverse team of expert editors with vast knowledge across various specializations, supporting both conventional and interdisciplinary research in business and management domains. We welcome any work that publishes scientifically accurate and valuable research to ensure that a variety of methods, data and voices from around the world are considered.

Our subject areas encompass a wide array of critical disciplines, including management, marketing, human resources management, project management, operations research, organization studies, supply chain management, entrepreneurship, management information systems, innovation and R&D, digital transformation, tourism, consumer research, and more.

At *Heliyon*, our evaluation process prioritizes scientific correctness and technical soundness. While novelty is appreciated, it is not a prerequisite for acceptance. We welcome empirical modeling, studies with negative or no results (so-called null result studies), incremental advances, and replication studies, and provide a fair and comprehensive platform for all valuable research.

Publishing in *Heliyon* is an opportunity for academic and professional advancement, offering benefits beyond traditional scholarly platforms. Our commitment to fast publication ensures your work reaches a global audience promptly, maintaining efficiency without compromising quality. Indexed in reputable databases and with press coverage, your research gains high visibility, fostering connections with colleagues and potential collaborators. Embracing open access principles, *Heliyon* grants you control over the distribution of your work, increasing its impact and engagement.

As we embark on our editorial term, during which the Section was introduced, the Section Editors of Heliyon Business and Management, who are also the authors of this article, have undertaken the initiative to compile a comprehensive guide on crafting effective papers. The primary objective of this endeavor is to establish clear expectations and recommendations for Business and Management Articles submitted to the journal. This effort is rooted in the understanding that submitting effective papers holds utmost importance, as it significantly enhances the likelihood of acceptance for publication in our journal. To ensure a successful submission, authors should familiarize themselves with recent publications, aligning their work with the journal's expectations. Meticulous editing

is essential, ensuring language quality, proper presentation, and ethical considerations are in place. Emphasizing clear and well-developed theory and methodology sections is vital for a strong submission. Demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of key literature and recent developments within the domain further strengthens the foundation of their work.

As this editorial article aims to offer valuable insights and practical recommendations, it addresses a diverse audience. Researchers and scholars in business and management, potential reviewers of the journal, and individuals aspiring for deeper involvement in the scholarly publication process will benefit from our guidance. Our primary goal is to emphasize the importance of producing excellent research papers and promote authors' academic and professional development. Additionally, we seek to emphasize the indispensable role of reviewers, encouraging deeper understanding and greater engagement within the broader scholarly publishing community.

This article offers a practical guide for authors and reviewers in *Heliyon*'s *Business and Management* Section. We start by explaining the types of papers we accept and break down the essential elements of a research paper (section 2). Then, in section 3, we provide specific guidelines for different research approaches. In section 4, we highlight the important role of reviewers and provide guidance for constructive reviewing. Our goal is to foster a collaborative and supportive environment between authors and reviewers.

Ultimately, our aim is to empower researchers, scholars, and potential reviewers with the tools they need to increase their chances of contributing to the *Heliyon Business and Management* Section.

## 2. Setting expectations

### 2.1. Types of papers accepted by Heliyon

*Heliyon*, as an all-science scholarly journal, disseminates rigorously peer-reviewed research spanning diverse scientific disciplines. The journal upholds stringent evaluation procedures, showcasing research contributions demonstrating scientific accuracy and substantive significance. However, it is essential to note that not all publication types cater to the specific requirements of the Business and Management Section. Table 1 provides an overview of the distinct article types that align particularly with the scope of the *Heliyon* Business and Management Section.

### 2.2. The blueprint of a paper

#### 2.2.1. A source for irritation and rejection

This section emphasizes the key elements of a well-structured journal article. A good paper structure is crucial because an unstructured one can lead to frustration for editors, reviewers, and readers, potentially resulting in rejection [1]. The following discourse builds upon the research work by Belcher [2], Cresswell & Cresswell [3], Kotzé [4], Reuber & Sharma [1].

#### 2.2.2. The elements of a paper

A well-structured research paper encompasses several key elements, each serving a specific purpose in conveying information effectively. We discuss these elements below. While the IMRD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) format is often associated with certain disciplines such as natural sciences, management, and business research, the empirical model should usually be motivated by the conceptual or theoretical background, which should be anchored in the literature. This means the second section after the introduction should contain the literature review and develop the hypotheses or research questions. We recommend authors consider incorporating the following listed elements in their papers, as they align well with the expectations of the Business and Management domain.

**Table 1**
*Heliyon* article types.

| Types | Description |
|---|---|
| **Research articles** | Research articles communicate systematic study findings and test hypotheses using rigorous scientific methods, encompassing various outcomes, such as positive and negative results, incremental advances, replication studies, and purely theoretical studies. We welcome studies that use either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. |
| **Review articles** | Review articles in *Heliyon* provide an unbiased and comprehensive overview of a specific research area. Authors are encouraged to write in an accessible style for an interdisciplinary readership, fostering a broader understanding across disciplines and catering to the diverse readership of the journal. |
| **Protocols** | Experiments are vital for testing ideas and improving performance in business, management, and other disciplines. Documenting procedures and methods is crucial for scientific rigor and reproducibility. Protocols in *Heliyon* provide authoritative instructions for conducting experiments, emphasizing usability and repeatability. By publishing protocols, *Heliyon* allows scientists to share successful and unsuccessful aspects of their experimental work. See the *Heliyon* protocol template at https://www.cell.com/pb-assets/journals/heliyon/CellPress_Heliyon_Protocol_Template-1666964944747.pdf. |
| **Correspondence articles** | Letters to the Editor in *Heliyon* allow scholarly discourse and engagement, addressing pertinent aspects of published work. Submit inquiries to info@heliyon.com for assistance. |
| **Systematic reviews and meta-analyses** | Systematic reviews and meta-analyses should adhere to established protocols such as Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) or any other recognized framework for conducting systematic reviews or bibliometric analyses. Please ensure that your manuscript includes a completed checklist corresponding to the specific protocol you've followed. |

Source: https://www.cell.com/heliyon/article-types

*2.3. Title*

The title of a research paper plays a critical role in capturing readers' attention and generating interest in the study. While creativity can be beneficial, overly clever or ambiguous titles may hinder readers' understanding of the subject. Prioritizing clarity and straightforwardness ensures that readers can grasp the topic and purpose of the paper easily. Avoiding excessive wordplay and metaphors can enhance the accessibility and reader-friendliness of the research. Striking the right balance in the title is essential for drawing readers in and facilitating their comprehension of the study.

*2.4. Abstract*

The abstract provides a brief one-paragraph, stand-alone, and structured research paper summary. Its length varies by journal, with *Heliyon*'s abstract limit being 300 words. Structured abstracts aid editors and reviewers in understanding the manuscript's focus and provide a glimpse into its content. *Heliyon* guidelines (https://www.cell.com/heliyon/guide-for-authors) require paper abstracts to briefly cover the research purpose, principal results, and major conclusions. However, several authors recommended enhancing the abstract's structure with the following points [2–4].

- Briefly state the research's purpose and need.
- Explain the study's primary purpose and relevance.
- Describe the methodology and data used.
- Present key findings and conclusions, including practical implications.

Keywords: Keywords are crucial for attracting readers and aiding article discovery [4]. *Heliyon* doesn't impose a limit to their number, but caution is advised to avoid diluting article clarity. Select relevant and concise keywords reflecting research themes accurately.

*2.5. Introduction*

The introduction is crucial to a research paper, capturing readers' interest and highlighting its significance. To create a comprehensive and engaging introduction, the following elements should be included in a structured manner, drawing guidance from experts.

- State the research problem or topic concisely, avoiding dictionary definitions or overgeneralized claims.
- Explain the academic or practical importance of the research, addressing why readers should care about the article.
- Provide a review of relevant literature and cite critical previous research related to the research problem.
- Identify gaps, deficiencies, inconsistencies, or controversies in the existing literature that the current study will address.
- Clearly indicate the research problem or question to be addressed, along with specific research objectives and study context (e.g., place and time).
- Explain the study's main contributions, highlighting how it advances literature and knowledge in the field.
- Provide a road map of the article, outlining the content to be covered in subsequent sections.

By incorporating these elements in the introduction, researchers can set the stage for a well-structured and compelling research paper that engages readers and conveys its significance effectively.

*2.6. Literature review*

The literature review is essential in academic papers, but poses challenges for researchers. It evaluates existing research, identifies relationships, limitations, and inadequate approaches. Navigating this section requires locating reliable sources, managing information effectively, and presenting a coherent and reader-friendly review.

Researchers should start by identifying and gathering relevant literature to craft a strong literature review. While Google Scholar is a good initial source, university libraries offer more comprehensive information. Supplementing the search with reputable sources like Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR, PubMed Central, and ResearchGate can enhance the review's depth. Careful selection and exploration of diverse sources allow for analyzing existing studies, identifying research gaps, and developing well-informed hypotheses or research questions. Proper citation and referencing practices are crucial to acknowledging sources contributing to the scholarly discourse.

After identifying literature sources, researchers should select peer-reviewed full-text documents for their study. The timeframe for the search, such as the last three, five, or ten years, can be subjective, but a general guideline could be to consider the last ten years while incorporating relevant classic studies. It is important that the authors provide a synthesis of the literature rather than listing the study results one by one.

Literature reviews uncover relationships, limitations, and problematic interpretations and serve as a foundation for generating hypotheses in the study. Hypotheses are predictions about specific events or variable relationships, contributing to the research's theoretical framework and guiding the investigation.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology section outlines the study's execution steps, enabling readers to assess method appropriateness and result reliability. Sufficient details aid other researchers in replicating the study and comparing findings. The methodology section should include the following elements.

● A schematic overview.
● Data description.
● Applied method.

The methodology section provides a clear and transparent data description for accuracy and trustworthiness. It includes the type, number of observations, and statistical measures like mean and standard deviation, ensuring consistency with the research method.

When gathering primary data through surveys or interviews, focus on describing the data collection process. Consider the following elements.

● Describe the sample and sampling procedure, including the number of participants and the method used.
● Explain the research context, specifying where and when the study was conducted.
● Include information regarding ethical approval for the research, adhering to the ethics and editorial policies of the journal (https://www.cell.com/heliyon/ethics).

In the scenario where primary data is collected for your study, the specific characteristics of the collected data will be thoroughly described in the findings section, which will be addressed in a subsequent part of this segment.

In the methodology section, the author(s) describe the applied method for the study, tailored to its unique requirements. Whether it involves quantitative methods, content analysis, thematic analysis, or other methods, clarity and conciseness, along with a rationale for their selection, are essential. Researchers should consider these aspects.

● Maintain consistent tense usage throughout the text, either in the present or past tense.
● Avoid teaching statistical analysis; keep it concise.
● Do not include results; reserve the results section for that purpose.

#### 3.1. Results and discussion

After detailing the methodology, we seamlessly integrate findings and discussions for analytical efficiency, presenting and explaining results concurrently, fostering a comprehensive understanding. The results section reveals discoveries from the analysis. *Heliyon* emphasizes clarity and conciseness, using tables and charts for better comprehension. Specific recommendations to enhance scholarly rigor in the results section include [2,4].

● Present only relevant results for the study's argument(s) and hypotheses.
● Avoid discussing basic statistical procedures in detail, assuming readers have prior knowledge, yet, ensure that all relevant data is available for the informed reader to assess the results critically.
● Use standardized tables and figures to present complex results, limiting their number and providing stand-alone captions.
● Organize results around the study's arguments, not the order of discovery.
● Maintain consistent tense usage throughout the text, either in the present or past tense, and keep it concise.

The research gains valuable insights into the findings through meticulous interpretation, shedding light on their significance and implications [5]. Tips for crafting the discussion section include [5].

● Avoid unsupported statements.
● Use quantitative descriptions, not vague expressions.
● Avoid introducing new terms abruptly.
● Speculate based on facts, not imagination.
● Address the original questions or objectives from the Introduction.
● Assess if the data support your hypothesis.
● Compare your results with other studies.
● Discuss weaknesses and unexpected results, providing explanations.
● Consider alternative interpretations of the results.
● Identify areas for further research.
● Explain novelty without exaggeration.

*3.2. Conclusion*

The conclusion section is a comprehensive discussion of the entire paper, with varying opinions on its title. Essential elements for this section include.

- State the primary study purpose.
- Summarize findings for each research objective or hypothesis without introducing new material.
- Relate findings to the literature and other researchers' results (confirming or contradicting other studies?).
- Claim the significance of the findings, explaining their importance to readers.
- Discuss the study's possible theoretical and managerial implications (suggestions for policies or policy changes).
- Highlight critical limitations affecting internal and external validity.
- Point out potential directions for future research on the topic.

*3.3. References*

The reference section is a crucial part of the research paper, listing all the sources used throughout the study. It provides detailed citations, maintains a consistent style guide, and adheres to the journal's specific referencing requirements. At *Heliyon*, presenting comprehensive, accurate, relevant, and up-to-date references enhances the research's scholarly integrity and credibility. Another important point is the number and type of references [6,7]. In scientific papers, it is essential to use reputable and well-established sources for references rather than relying on obscure sources. We strongly recommend sources classified as CABS = 4*/4/3, ABDC = A*/A, WOS or Scopus = Q1/Q2, SCI or SSCI = Impact Factor $\geq$1. A standard empirical research article should not exceed 50–60 references. Conceptual papers and literature reviews may contain more references. References should be balanced (geographically, period, school of thought, avoid citation cartels). The editors suggest minimizing self-citations.

*3.4. Common mistakes to avoid when submitting papers*

In the previous section, we discussed a structure for setting up a research paper and have provided multiple guidelines to help you prepare your manuscript. However, it is still good to discuss some common problems that authors need to consider and avoid before submitting their papers. These issues can help authors reduce their chances of getting their papers rejected.

When crafting your scientific articles, ensure that your writing maintains a coherent flow, making it easily understandable to your readers. Always be cautious not to fall into the trap of over-interpreting your study results or injecting personal opinions or unwarranted criticism into your work. Uphold the utmost integrity by avoiding plagiarism, falsification, or duplication, as these actions can severely damage your academic standing. Additionally, be meticulous in describing your study's population and instruments, avoiding any inadequacies or inappropriateness in your explanations, while also valuing the feedback provided by editors and reviewers as an opportunity for improvement in your scholarly endeavors. An analytical list of common mistakes to avoid based on [8,9] is presented in Table 2.

## 4. Guidelines for common types of papers

*4.1. Systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis*

*Heliyon* Business and Management receives a large number of manuscripts using a systematic literature review or bibliometric analysis. A systematic literature review attempts 'to identify, appraise and synthesize all the empirical evidence that meets pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a given research question' [10]. The bibliometric methodology involves the use of quantitative techniques to analyze data on publications and citation units [11]. Studies using related research methods such as scoping review and meta-analysis are also welcome. There are now new advances in the field of bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review [11] for bibliometric analysis and [12,13] for systematic literature reviews). It is crucial to justify the decision to use a bibliometric

**Table 2**
Common mistakes to avoid when crafting your paper.

1. Avoid incoherent text, where the ideas and the overall text do not flow smoothly in the introduction (poorly written or difficult-to-follow text).
2. Do not overuse italics, abbreviations, or passive language.
3. Avoid grammatical errors and odd sentence constructions (use professional proofreading and grammar check).
4. Avoid inappropriate, incomplete, or insufficiently described statistics.
5. Avoid over-interpretation of study results.
6. Avoid personal opinions or destructive criticism of others' works.
7. Do not plagiarize, falsify, or duplicate (academic self-destruction).
8. Do not overestimate results.
9. Avoid using inappropriate, suboptimal, or insufficiently described populations or instruments.
10. Avoid small or biased samples (reweighting of sample results may be needed before doing the analyses).
11. Do not forget to include Institutional Review Boards (IRB) or relevant institutional approvals if this is needed.
12. Do not ignore the editor or reviewer's comments.

analysis. It should be used when the scope of the review is broad and the amount of data is too large for a manual review compared to a systematic literature review (see Refs. [11,12]).

According to Snyder [14], a literature review can be broadly defined as a systematic approach to collecting and summarizing prior research. A systematic literature review adheres to standardized and well-defined procedures. Papers conducting a systematic literature review or bibliometric analysis should acknowledge the contributions of similar reviews in the field. If the submitted manuscript is not the first, the limitations of previous reviews should be stated, as well as the alternative perspective you wish to provide and why is this alternative perspective necessary, meaningful, relevant, and urgent. Studies using a systematic literature review, or a bibliometric analysis should clearly state two or three research questions that are analyzed. The data collection process, including the selection of journals and articles, should adhere to a well-defined protocol. The most widely recognized protocol is the PRISMA protocol. Additionally, Paul et al. [12] have introduced the SPAR-4 SLR protocol, trying to fit better systematic literature reviews in business and management.

It is important to document the theoretical limits of the search, the search terms, and the time frame of the search. In addition, details of the journal's database (Web of Science, Scopus or publisher databases such as Elsevier, Sage, JSTOR, Wiley, Emerald, Taylor and Francis and Springer) should be provided, as well as details of the period, exclusion criteria and the corresponding justifications. An important part of the analysis is to provide a discussion section as well as implications and further research possibilities. In the case of systematic literature reviews, it is also appreciated to categorize the empirical methods used in the cited studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed or experimental methods) and the data used (survey data). It is important that the discussion of the studies not only summarizes the results of the bibliometric analysis, but also offers new insights for theory and future research. This could be a discussion of any shifts in themes or the performance of institutions or researchers over time or suggestions of methods that are less used in this field.

The bibliometric analysis is also a method that is increasingly being carried out with software tools like VOSviewer [15] or the Bibliometrix R package [16]. Such an analysis should not be limited to counting articles or citations by different dimensions. Suggestions for future research should be highlighted that should go beyond bibliometric issues. There is a wide range of bibliometric analysis indicators that should be used [11]. This includes publication-related metrics (total publications, publications from academia, publications from industry, publications from academia-industry collaboration, number of contributing authors, sole-authored publications, co-authored publications etc.), citation-related metrics (total citations, average citations, citation-and-publication-related metrics, collaboration index, collaboration coefficient, number of cited publications, proportion of cited publications, citations per cited publication, h-index, g-index and science mapping (citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-word analysis and co-authorship analysis. There are also different techniques that should be used (network techniques, clustering, etc.).

*4.2. Studies using quantitative research methods*

Quantitative methods are often used in business and management research. Statistical methods and regression analyses are the most important tools. Examples are bivariate correlations, chi-square tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), decision trees, support vector machines, principal component analysis and cluster analysis. In general, a distinction can be made between the analysis of limited dependent variables and methods for continuous variables [17,18]. The main data are either time series data, cross-sectional data based on surveys or panel data (unbalanced or balanced). With advances in the internet and software, there is a wide range of spatial data, social media, network data, text data, image data and audio data. They can all be useful in the context of business and management. Regression analysis reveals the relationships between a set of variables derived from continuous (levels, ratios, proportions) or limited dependent variables (dummy variables, Likert scale variables or count data) [17,18]. There are single equation models or a system of equations (structural equation modeling based on latent data). A wide range of methods is available depending on the nature of data (ordinary least squares, count data models, Instrumental variable methods and limited dependent variables) [17,18]. A general trend in empirical modeling is to try to quantify the causal effect of an explanatory variable on the dependent variable [19].

In general, contributions in the field of business and management are expected to have a theoretical background and contain the research questions or hypotheses. When used, the regression equation should be derived from some of the main theories of innovation management (e.g., technology acceptance model, innovation diffusion theory), theory of planned behavior, or theories of strategic management (e.g., stakeholder, principal-agent theory, dynamic capabilities theory, institutional theory, resource-based theory, ecosystem theory). In the context of tourism research, the push-pull theory, travel career, leader theory, destination life cycle theory, tourism system theory, and sustainable tourism theory are useful. It is important that studies have a theoretical background. This can also be based on scientific frameworks rather than theory, for example, to identify key concepts and relationships relevant to the research question or to develop hypotheses about the relationships between concepts.

The Business and Management Section of *Heliyon* receives many submissions that apply structural equation modeling (partial least squares or covariance-based models) and the meditation tools developed by Hayes [20] to stand-alone cross-sectional data. The editors welcome submissions that use these methods and data. However, there are some things that need to be considered. First, the empirical model and specification should be theoretically motivated, and hypotheses should be formulated. In general, the hypotheses should be formulated as relationships or associations since effects or impacts are difficult to estimate [21,22]. It is also advised to outline and explain the regression specification, presenting all equations along with their respective parameters and variables.

In the empirical part, information should be given on the sampling and selection method of the data (e.g., stratified random sampling, random sampling). A link to the questionnaire should be provided (for instance in the appendix). It is recommended to provide as much information as possible, e.g., the dates on which the study was conducted. Many studies use survey data from

individuals. Informed consent should be obtained from the participants. The ethical approval should be obtained with the full name of the approving ethics committee and confirmation that informed consent is obtained from all participants in the study. A table with the characteristics of the respondents should be given (socio-economic characteristics or firm characteristics). Descriptive statistics should be provided for all the variables, no matter their measurement scales. For indicator variables (dummy), only the means should be displayed (percentages).

The choice of estimation method should be justified. The literature discusses which methods should be preferred in exploratory research to develop theories. It is often argued that covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) is usually used to confirm or reject theories, while partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) is primarily used for exploratory research and for predictions [23].

In the empirical results section, all validity tests for the structural and measurement model should be displayed and interpreted. For some methods, the normal distribution of the variables should be checked. A note to the regression tables with explanations should be provided. An assessment of multicollinearity should be provided (VIF factor) as well.

An important issue in quantitative research based on surveys is the common method bias (CMB). It basically occurs in survey research when all data (independent variables, dependent variables and mediating and moderating variables) are collected using the same method [24,25]. This potentially results in a bias in the estimations. This has to be discussed and addressed.

The social desirability bias is another issue that is relevant when individuals or firms are asked about green behavior or socially expected behavior. This has to be discussed and there are several ways to deal with this such that the respondents are informed and assured of the anonymity, confidentiality, and purely academic use of their answers [26]. Another idea is that the questionnaire items are presented in a randomized order to restrict participants' ability to decipher which construct they relate to, as this approach has been shown to help reduce the social desirability effect in prior studies [27].

The Business and Management Section also receives many contributions that use balance sheet data or other micro data (household, individual and business level data). Typical research questions are related to firm behavior or individual behavior. The choice of estimation methods depends on the nature of the data at hand, taking into account factors such as the data structure and the type of variable. For limited dependent variables (ordered categorical variables or indicator variables) a wide range of estimation methods is available. Firm-level panel data are usually analyzed using Static fixed effects models or dynamic panel data models.

Reporting the estimates is another important issue. It is important that the regression tables contain all the details to understand the results. Reporting of two to three decimal places for the coefficients and t-statistics or standard errors is sufficient. It is not necessary to indicate both the significance levels and the t-stat/z-stat. If you use a limited dependent variable method (Probit and logit for binary outcomes, Ordered logit/probit and the generalized ordered logit model for ordinal outcomes and multinomial logit for nominal outcomes) indicate the marginal effects. A note with the definition of the asterisks for the significance levels is required. This note should include information about the dependent variable and the estimation procedure. It is also advisable to include the name of the software package and the command to allow others to reproduce and replicate the estimates. In recent years, there have been concerns regarding the replicability and reproducibility of published research in the social sciences including management [28].

In the empirical results section, the magnitude of the relationships should be interpreted and not only the direction and significance. It is also advisable to offer robustness checks (companies: different sectors, for SMEs and large firms, and individuals: age, gender or age groups).

It is important to note that regressions alone do not guarantee causality. Correlation-based methods, including structural equation modeling, applied to one-off cross-sectional survey data without intervention, provide insights into relationships, not causes [21]. It is the identification strategies employed in the research design and empirical framework using regressions that allow for causal interpretation of the results [22]. Causality can be demonstrated through methods such as randomized control trials, quasi-natural experiments, regression discontinuities and instrumental variables, and difference-in-differences approaches or the synthetic control function approach, which allows causal interpretation of regression results [19]. If the purpose of the paper is to claim that a variable X has an effect on Y, a clear identification strategy must be described. This requires a control group with similar characteristics to the treatment group.

Manuscripts using experimental designs (laboratory, field and quasi-experimental studies) are still relatively underused. The Section Business and Management welcomes submissions using these methods. Other quantitative methods such as SWOT or Delphi analyses or operations research methods such as decision-making techniques [29] are also welcomed by the editors. However, the methods should be embedded in the theoretical and empirical business and management literature. The methods should be justified, and their limitations and strengths highlighted.

### 4.3. Studies using qualitative research methods and purely theoretical studies

The editors of the Section welcome contributions that use qualitative approaches, provided that they adhere to established qualitative methodologies and are rigorously applied in the research process. There is a wide range of these methods, such as case studies, open or semi-structured interviews, content analyses or ethnographic approaches [30]. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) like NVivo or ATLAS. ti are utilities for qualitative data management and analysis here. Studies using such methods should be accompanied by a theoretical contribution from the field of business and management. The interviews should be described in sufficient detail (selection of interviewees, duration, characteristics of interviewees). Authors should also be aware of the limitations that studies using qualitative research methods cannot be generalized and cause-effect hypotheses cannot be tested.

Recently, qualitative and quantitative research methods have been combined to form a so-called mixed-methods approach. In principle, a variety of methods is preferred, but this is not a condition for publication in the Business and Management Section of *Heliyon*.

Purely theoretical papers are also welcome in the Section. Examples are game models or evolutionary game models. For example, game theory is often used to explain cooperative relationships and strategic interactions between firms. However, it is advisable to illustrate and motivate the model with some empirical facts or examples from practice. A calibration or simulation of the model is also advisable. A sensitivity analysis by varying the assumptions of the model is desirable. Implications for management and policy need to be presented.

One form of inquiry encompassing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research paradigms is the utilization of case studies. When submitting case studies to the Business and Management Section, it is advisable to adhere to rigorous academic standards. This entails formulating a well-defined research question, employing meticulous data collection methodologies that are well-reported, and conducting a thorough analysis. The outcomes of the case study must adhere to the principles of validity and reliability, signifying that they should demonstrate precision, coherence, and alignment with the data upon which they are founded. It is important to note that the generalizability of findings from a single case study is typically constrained, limiting the extent to which broader conclusions can be drawn.

## 5. The ideal review process

### 5.1. Empowering reviewers: guiding with a constructive advisory role

As a reviewer, the primary objective is to offer expert insights to assist the Editor's assessment and decision. In this respect, reviewers act as consultants and advisors, not decision-makers [31]. The mindset they adopt significantly impacts their editorial approach – whether they focus on identifying reasons to reject the manuscript or helping the authors improve their submission. A strong inclination to find flaws alone could unintentionally hinder the publication of a potentially impactful paper. While recognizing the importance of identifying issues, fostering a constructive mindset allows reviewers to assess a paper's potential beyond its imperfections. Remember that no paper is flawless, and providing a comprehensive assessment involves not only listing problems but also using judgment to weigh the paper's strengths and weaknesses. Embracing a constructive mindset is crucial to achieving this goal.

After all, reviewers also play the role of essential contributors in the scholarly journal system. Reviewers fulfill a professional obligation, reciprocating for their submissions. Engaging in this process brings reputational, social, and intellectual advantages, fostering relationships with editors, staying updated on recent developments, and enhancing research and writing skills. Reviewing is a fertile ground for intellectual growth and effectiveness as authors and scholars.

*Heliyon* actively champions the scholarly activity of reviewing, recognizing its importance in the academic community. Engaged reviewers are often considered for invitations to join the journal's Advisory Board, as a token of our appreciation for their valuable contributions to the peer-review process.

### 5.2. Guidelines for effective reviewing: elevating review quality

Drawing from insights in the scholarly literature [32–35], we craft in this paragraph some fundamental guidelines to promote effective reviewing practices, ensuring the delivery of high-quality reviews while upholding the integrity of the review process.

Effective reviewing involves providing sufficient feedback, with an array of concerns, ranging from major to minor. A high-quality review should identify critical issues that significantly impact a paper's potential to be published and distinguish them from addressable concerns or limitations. Substantiated claims and suggestions, supported by strong rationale and evidence, enhance the usefulness and transparency of reviews. Reviewers should refrain from making unsubstantiated claims (e.g., "the findings are not interesting", "the research methodology has many errors"), providing convincing explanations when recommending changes to authors' contributions, and outlining the value of suggested improvements.

Moreover, reviewers should preserve the authors' voice, avoiding ghostwriting or imposing personal preferences that do not affect the paper's potential to be published. Emphasizing the authors' framework over reviewers' preferred perspectives fosters constructive evaluations. While offering suggestions for improvement, reviewers should remain open-minded about alternative approaches that authors may choose. Diligently identifying major issues in the initial review is crucial to avoid costly surprises in subsequent rounds and reflects the hallmark of a strong reviewer. Timely reviews are essential to support colleagues' careers and maintain the integrity of the review process. Furthermore, reviewers should refrain from promoting irrelevant citations, adhering to ethical standards.

An ideal reviewer embodies the qualities of critical thinking, respectful demeanor, impartiality, timeliness, ethical conduct, expertise in the field, and effective communication. To help remember these essential attributes, we've coined the mnemonic "CRITEEC" - "Constructive Reviewers Intelligently Thrive, Ethically Embrace Communication". This serves as a playful yet poignant reminder that a reviewer's role extends beyond evaluation; it encompasses a commitment to the integrity and advancement of scholarly discourse. Ultimately, a virtuous review should mirror the type of feedback reviewers would appreciate as authors.

## 6. Conclusions

This editorial emphasizes the essential role of careful paper preparation and following academic standards within the *Heliyon Business and Management* Section. We encourage authors to understand the importance of crafting well-structured articles, as this not only improves their chances of acceptance but also significantly contributes to the academic conversation. Furthermore, it's crucial for prospective authors to avoid common mistakes like poor reporting and ethical issues, as this ensures the credibility of their work. Embracing feedback for improvement and upholding academic integrity should guide the scholarly journey. As we continue to

welcome various research, from empirical studies to theoretical papers, we invite authors to explore this dynamic platform with academic rigor and creativity.

Looking ahead, we anticipate a future enriched by innovative and insightful contributions from our research community. The collaboration between authors, reviewers, and editors in the *Heliyon Business and Management* Section will surely advance our collective knowledge in this field. Ultimately, our dedication to nurturing a lively scholarly community and pushing the boundaries of business and management research remains steadfast. We eagerly await the valuable contributions authors will make, shaping the future of our discipline.

## Credit author statement

**Pavlos Delias:** Writing – review & editing. **Martin Thomas Falk:** Writing – review & editing. **Jorge Ridderstaat:** Writing – review & editing.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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