The Social Responsibility of the Cameroonian Researcher in Management Sciences

Essono Bella Eustache
Ph.D en Sciences de Gestion,
Institut Universitaire Catholique de Bertoua, Cameroun
Dadem Kemgou Edouard Guilaire
Department of Banking and Finance of the University of Bamenda
Ongono Amogo Tobie Nicaise
Department of Accounting and Finance of the University of Dschang
Belibi Gatte Gaelle Clarisse
Doctorante en Sciences de Gestion, Université de Yaoundé II, Cameroun

Abstract

This article aims to initiate a reflection on managerial CSR in the Cameroonian context. A concept still little known in Africa in general, CSR draws its sources from numerous works on CSR. A look at the state of research in Cameroon shows that the practice of responsible research is a real feat. An assessment of the apprehensions that teacher-researchers have about their SR is necessary to begin work on this theme. We are calling on different stakeholders to improve SG research in Cameroon. This improvement will undoubtedly pass better through a research model such as "Grounded theory", considered as a reference epistemological model for better production of managerial knowledge on African soil.

Keywords: Social responsibility of the researcher, Management sciences, Teacher-researcher - Cameroon

1.   Introduction

How to understand the social responsibility of a researcher in management sciences? This is the questioning that seems to guide contemporary debates subject to the scientific practices of our time. How can we approach reflection on the theme of researcher social responsibility (RSC) in a developing country like Cameroon where research activity has still not really taken off? This is rather the orientation that the problem of CSR gives rise to in our context. This last question is at the center of the reflections that we carry out in this work and underlies many of the issues which drive the debates around the purpose of research in management sciences today. These questions revolve around the role of management research (David et al., 2000; Verstraete, 2007; Savall, 2012), debates on the conciliation or separation between theoretical and practical contributions (Mesny and Mailhot, 2010; St -Pierre and Schmitt, 2011), the value of scientific publications (Aggeri, 2016; Lussier and Chanlat, 2017), the usefulness of managerial research as well as its anchoring in organizational realities (Demil et al., 2014; Perez, 2008).

Several works have attempted to find resolutions to these different questions. The culmination of reflections on social responsibility (SR) in the field of research leads us to understand that these problems are fundamental, persistent and evolving. To this end, the objective of this article is in view of the Cameroonian university system, the prevailing research environment and the awareness of the role that managerial scientific research should play in a country where everything has to be redone, to reflect on the SR of teacher-researchers; by laying the very foundations of this reflection from the outset. The goal of such research is undoubtedly to be able to produce work that meets the expectations of society in the broad sense and which is no longer just research for research's sake as is currently observed in our context.

The interest of such a reflection lies in a concern for questioning, awareness and education both of the teacher-researchers themselves, and of those in power who must establish the premises of an appropriate framework for better scientific practice; but also to support the researcher in this rather complex task. In this sense, the present contribution remains theoretical while opening the way to more empirical contributions which could, for example, precisely understand the perceptions that teacher-researchers in our context have of their own SR.

To begin this reflection, we mobilize a theoretical approach which takes as its starting point the foundations of the concept of SR. We subsequently show how this SR, originally centered on the analysis of behavior in simple business, has extended to almost all spheres of human life and particularly to scientific activity. In the second part of our study, we focus on the particular case of scientific research in management sciences

(SG); idea of justifying why a reflection on SR in this area. The third and final part takes stock of the research in a very specific context which is that of Cameroon where the concept of RSC still seems poorly mastered but where the need for awareness appears more than imperative. By following Chevalier and Kamdem (2019), we mobilize "Grounded Theory" as an appropriate epistemological framework for more responsible managerial research in Africa and particularly in Cameroon.

2. Characterization of social responsibility among teacher-researchers

The problem of the social responsibility of the researcher is not specific either to researchers in SG, nor to researchers in developing countries (DCs) such as Cameroon, but a theme which concerns the entire scientific community today; even if the problem obviously arises with greater importance in the context of developing countries. Before addressing social responsibility among teacher-researchers, it seems imperative to shed light on a certain number of concepts which surround and which in some way constitute the foundations of this social responsibility.

2.1. Foundations of the concept of social responsibility

The concept of sustainable development (SD) born in the 1980s has long remained the domain of experts. But gradually, it has become a concern for everyone, affecting all areas of social life. Nowadays, there is no human activity that does not integrate SD practices. In the field of organizational management, this integration has led to a change in methods, leading to the appearance of new managerial practices (Acquier and Aggeri, 2008). These different mutations have aroused great interest within the scientific community, particularly in management sciences, where many researchers have rushed into themes relating to SD issues (Cooper and Owen, 2007; Igalens, 2004; Martinet and Reynaud, 2001). Initially considered as very distinct semantic fields, with social responsibility challenging the company on its role in society and SD supposed to guarantee a better future for the planet, the two concepts are today analogous. To this end, the authors define corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the contribution of the latter to sustainable development (Quairel and Capron, 2013).

The adjective "responsible" has been adopted since the Middle Ages and took either the meaning of resisting (a fortress "responsible to harsh assaults"); or then designated a person required to respond ("justiciable and responsible") (Prairat, 2012). "Responsibility", on the other hand, is a fairly recent concept, its appearance only dating back to the 18th century. At this period, it was a polysemic, ambiguous notion whose definition remained unfinished. Even today, this state of affairs has not changed considerably to

the point where we can clearly see that even the etymological origins of the term still pose a problem[1].

Despite such difficulty in finding a unanimous etymological origin for the concept of responsibility, we can note a growing interest from numerous authors and in various fields (legal, political, ethical, social, managerial, environmental, etc.), with the aim of clarifying and to deepen the knowledge of this concept.

   To this end, Lemaitre (2006) studies the foundations and definition of the concept of "responsibility" by distinguishing between legal, moral and managerial responsibilities. Originally, his work aimed to shed light on the "conceptual vagueness" which characterizes the managerial dimension of corporate responsibility. To this end, it places the legal meaning of responsibility prior to its moral and managerial meaning. More precisely, it places the first mentions of the term "responsibility" in the period preceding the French Revolution (1789-1799). The term then reflects "reparation for damage caused". Other authors have also studied the foundations of the concept of responsibility (Reynaud, 2009; Prairat, 2012; Bouquet, 2009) and it emerges from their work that responsibility has legal, moral or ethical and philosophical foundations.

   Henriot (1977) and Lemaitre (2006) rather attribute the premises of the concept of responsibility to legal uses. The authors situate the appearance of the term in relation to the interest of jurists in resolving the question of compensation for the damage suffered. In the legal approach, responsibility designates for a legal person (natural or legal), the fact of being held to obligations resulting from the acts that they are recognized as having committed. In this conception, the liability is either contractual, and in this case it results from a breach of an agreement in which the actor has himself committed; is then criminal and it refers to deviant behavior having caused harm to others (Prairat, 2012). Legal responsibility, closely linked to civil liability and criminal liability, is therefore considered causal responsibility.

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[1] Indeed, it appears that the term "responsibility" etymologically derives sometimes from the Latin "re-spondéo", which means "responsible for", to guarantee a promise, a commitment, that is to say to accept the burden (Lemaitre, 2006, p. 6). Sometimes from the Latin "respondeo", whose meaning is much more to respond to a call or a summons (Prairat, 2012). For Bouquet (2009), "respondeo" means "I become responsible by responding – by action or by word – to the call of someone or something".
On the other hand, according to Reynaud (2009) and Bouquet (2009), the term "responsibility" comes etymologically from the Latin verb "respondere" and which means obligation to "respond", to act as a "guarantor". Furthermore, Bouquet (2009) also attributes the origin of the term to the Latin roots of the word "sportio", which refers to the idea of "being a guarantor, of being a guarantor of the events that will occur, of referring to a projective mechanism, turned towards the future.

It integrates the ideas of reparation on the one hand and punishment of damage on the other hand, in relation to the acts committed by a subject. As a result, it involves a subject, a damage and a cause and effect link between the subject and the damage (Jonas, 1990).

In its moral approach, responsibility stands out rather from the simple causal link which bases the legal conception of responsibility, although this link is an important component of the notion of responsibility. This rather has a philosophical link since it is linked to the relationships that a subject can have with his own conscience that is to say to his capacity to differentiate what is good from what is bad. Responsibility must therefore not be reduced to the cause. It therefore integrates other, more complex conceptions which make it increasingly ambiguous (Lemaitre, 2006).

The ethical perspective of responsibility initiated by Levinas and also called "Levinassian responsibility", is a responsibility of others. It is therefore no longer a question, as in the case of legal responsibility, of answering for oneself before others, but rather of answering to others for one's faults and the suffering of the other. It is a moral responsibility whose pre-eminence is fixed over others. Interest in the field of philosophy in the concept of responsibility emerged around the 1960s. It is the most recent and is largely influenced by the moral antecedents of the unprecedented technical progress developed by men. Thus according to Jaspers (1958), the appearance of the atomic bomb and the threats of insecurity and destabilization of the world which followed, made it possible to redefine man's responsibility. But over the years, technical possibilities and human actions have subjected our world to an unprecedented transformation. Hence the need for a redefinition of the legal and ethical framework of human action (Ricoeur, 1991). It emerges after this conceptual analysis that responsibility remains a polysemous notion but above all that we encounter it in all areas of reflection. The following section leads us to understand how the concept of social responsibility has been transposed to the researcher's profession.

1.2.   From social responsibility to the social responsibility of the researcher

RS is a concept that has largely been developed in the business field through the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In this part we show how the different concepts of SR have evolved over time. It should be noted that in the classic approach to the finance of modern companies before the Second World War, the sole responsibility of the company was directed towards the shareholders to whom the managers had the obligation to pay dividends and to act solely for their benefit. However, the post-war period will see the emergence of a new trend when large

American companies, in the desire to restore their image destroyed by the crisis of 1929, will begin to adopt philanthropic measures, patronage and participation in the 'war effort. Bowen (1953) spoke of corporate social responsibility (henceforth CSR) and defined it as "the obligation of business leaders to pursue policies and make decisions consistent with the values held by society". Since then, the theme has aroused unprecedented interest in its approaches, both theoretical and practical.

Much later in the 2010s, the work carried out as part of the establishment of the ISO 26,000[2] standard led to the broadening of social responsibility going from a responsibility focused only on companies, to a responsibility now focused on the organization as a whole. We will now talk about organizational social responsibility (CSR). It is in fact the desire to extend the actions of an organization to the whole of society, but also to integrate social responsibility into all organizations. We can now talk about social responsibility in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities, associations, etc.

CSR can then be defined generally as "the management by an organization of the social and environmental impacts of its activities on society, accompanied by a constant and two-way dialogue with stakeholders" (Capron, 2009). For an organization, it is about behaving responsibly and contributing to the social development of the society in which it operates. In this sense we can analyze the SR of the public organization which is the university. The social responsibility of universities (RSU), which is therefore a new and emerging concept, reflects the perception of the university beyond its sole teaching function, instead taking into consideration the three main pillars of higher education which are: teaching, research and service to society. More precisely, it is about the integration by universities of cultural, socio-economic and environmental concerns into their activities and their relations with the world of work, as well as all other components of society (Benjouad, 2015). At the university, social responsibility will be analyzed at the institutional level on the one hand and at the individual level, that is to say through that of the members working within this institution. Thus in this research, we are interested in the responsibility of the university in terms of scientific production and by extension in the social responsibility of teacher-researchers, who are the main architects of this scientific production.

The responsibility of the researcher is therefore a field of research and a current theme of discussion not only within the academic community,

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[2] The ISO 26000 standard is a conceptual framework that provides guidelines for businesses and organizations in general to operate in a socially responsible manner. It is about acting ethically and transparently in order to contribute to the good health and well-being of society.

but also and increasingly in public debates. This is a question that crosses all scientific fields, extending from so-called "experimental" sciences to social sciences. The responsibility of the researcher can be defined as "the fact of answering for his research acts, as well as for his non-acts, here and there, today and tomorrow" (Bergadaà, 2004). This responsibility inevitably falls under the actions of the researcher in the exercise of his duties. The responsibility of researchers is a very general concept which is confusing since it appears both very broad and very restricted. On the one hand, it is very broad because we cannot have a homogeneous community of researchers. Rather, we have a community that is of such diversity (social diversity, diversity of interest, diversity of power, etc.) that there seems little point in talking about a responsibility of researchers in general. This seems to indicate that we can put in the same basket the young doctoral student and the Director of a research laboratory who also exercises responsibilities at the head of an institution (Lévy-Leblond, 2018; Coutellec, 2018). On the other hand, talking about the responsibilities of researchers seems very limited, since most of the time, we equate research with science. However, science is not limited to research, it is rather exhaustive and integrates the production, sharing and application of knowledge (Lévy-Leblond, 2018).

From this point of view, we could say in a certain way that university executives, made up largely of teacher-researchers, perhaps have a greater responsibility than isolated researchers; to the extent that they are the trainers of future researchers and therefore their shortcomings, which are not individual shortcomings, but shortcomings of the training system, make them responsible for the irresponsibility of those they have trained. We are thus witnessing a great collective responsibility, especially on the part of teacher-researchers, due to the fact that the training of scientists today is completely decontextualized (Lévy-Leblond, 2018).

Many authors have defined and characterized RSC. To this end, Dreveton (2015) defines the social responsibility of the researcher as "an individual responsibility (linked to the choice of the researcher), collective (linked to the researcher's membership in a research community), but also societal (linked to the integration of societal dimensions in the researcher's action and in the analysis of its consequences). He thereby identifies three levels of responsibility of a researcher. Firstly, "individual responsibility" which refers to the explicit and tacit skills mobilized by the researcher in the exercise of his profession. The notion of responsibility here refers to the capacity that the researcher has to implement a research approach which allows him to generate new scientific knowledge.

The addition of the qualifier "social" refers to the notion of morality and the way in which the researcher will integrate it into his or her research activity. Morality governs the choice of individuals; it is defined as

a system of rules that the individual follows or must follow (Ricoeur, 1990). This first level of responsibility therefore corresponds to the vision developed by the researcher on his own activity and the mechanism of which appears at the level of the research design, which itself is a personal decision which engages the social responsibility of the researcher (Dreveton, 2015).

The second level of responsibility identified is institutional "responsibility". Throughout his career, the researcher must show that he has mastered the epistemological and methodological canons supposed to lead him to the production of valid knowledge from a scientific point of view. Thus, responsibility is not only exercised on ontological and phenomenological levels, it goes beyond a questioning of what is right or wrong to do (morality). This second level of responsibility reveals the collective nature of responsibility. In this regard, being responsible means being able to answer for your actions. The social dimension of research activities is found at this level in the notions of deontology or even ethics. For Bergadaà (2004), ethics brings together a set of duties and obligations of a profession towards its stakeholders. It governs a profession and therefore the behavior of those who practice it.

The third level of researcher responsibility is "collective responsibility", which evokes the societal dimension of research activities. As Jonas (1990) indicates, the universal imperative of Kantian duty is superseded in favor of an anticipation of the social consequences of actions: "Act in such a way that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of a authentic human life. The notion of social responsibility therefore seems to go further than those of ethics or professional conduct. It becomes the fair counterpart of freedom as a principle of action. Here, the actor is only free to the extent that he assumes all the consequences of his actions.

The researcher, like any actor in society, must be able to answer for his actions and their societal consequences. Within this third level of responsibility, the researcher must no longer only respect a constraint emanating from deontological or ethical codes (Anglo-Saxon vision of social responsibility), but adopt innovative behavior aimed at placing the societal dimension at the heart of his or her work activity (Latin vision of social responsibility) (Dreveton, 2015). Placing the societal dimension at the heart of research activity means, for the researcher, creating scientific knowledge that is also actionable[3] for business stakeholders (Argyris, 1995). As David (2002) explains, the researcher engages in research to help an organization solve a problem. He participates in the definition of the latter and can

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[3] Actionable knowledge was defined by Argyris (1993) as knowledge that is both valuable and can be "put into action" in everyday life (p. 257).

propose, or even design, a certain number of tools allowing it to be resolved. Callon (2008) goes further by talking about performative[4] research.

2.   Special case of the management sciences researcher

The historical evolution of the field of management reveals an original link between research and practice. The great theorists and precursors in management of the first half of the 20th century such as Taylor, Fayol, Ford, Weber, Follet, had their merit thanks to their familiarization with business. This predisposes management as a field whose primary objective is to produce doctrines, tools and techniques at the service of practitioners. This is the very legitimacy of SGs whose negative heuristic is organization. However, the debates around the crisis of usefulness and the lack of impact of management research which have largely highlighted the loss of meaning of scientific activity in management, have generated another debate which is that of responsibility around these drifts. This new debate is centered on the normative analysis of CSR. This analysis consolidates the idea that when it comes to SR, there is no common one accepted by all. However, there are two main approaches to the social responsibility of the researcher: a so-called neutrality approach and a so-called interactionist approach.

The neutrality approach advocates a researcher's responsibility consisting essentially of producing objective and reliable knowledge through a disinterested research process motivated solely by curiosity (Shuurbiers, 2010). According to this approach, research should be governed by Mertonian norms (communalism, universalism, disinterestedness and organized skepticism). The researcher is therefore not concerned by the social and ethical dimensions linked to his work. It is in fact the responsibility of the scientific community, decision-makers as well as research users to ensure the continuity of the research process by trying to promote the results made available to them by researchers. Therefore, it is the duty of researchers to disengage from the broader socio-ethical debates in which research operates. However, this approach has suffered criticism despite serving as the dominant frame of reference for analyzing the responsibilities of the researcher for most of the 20th century (Douglas, 2009). Thus, ethics specialists have argued that this approach unfairly

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[4] Performativity in its sociological sense therefore refers to the propensity of a statement or theory to construct the empirical object or phenomenon that it describes (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Callon, 1998; MacKenzie and Millo, 2003). , Gond, 2010). More precisely, performative knowledge can be likened to a medicine that changes the condition of the patient to whom it is administered. Thus, when faced with an organizational problem, if actionable knowledge is a possible solution, performativity is its materialization (Biwolé Fouda, 2017).

neutralizes the moral responsibilities of researchers (Ziman, 1998; Van de Poel and Van Gorp, 2006).

The interactionist approach to the social responsibility of the researcher has been put forward by philosophers and sociologists of science, as well as other scientists at various points in history (Jonas, 1984; Roosevelt, 1936; Rose, 1969). ; Russell and Einstein, 1955; Verhoog, 1980). In this approach, "no separation should be made between the scientist as a scientist, solely responsible for science, and the scientist as a citizen" (Verhoog, 1980, p.180). Many authors then conceive that the responsibility of the researcher must be broader by integrating socio-ethical considerations which surround the research (Shuurbiers, 2010), even more that it must go beyond its traditional meaning by integrating the consequences of its actions on society and the environment (Perez, 2003).

3.   The social responsibility of the Cameroonian researcher in management sciences

It is not easy to address the issue of CSR in the Cameroonian context given the many limitations facing this activity. If we do not have precise statistics regarding research in SG in Cameroon, we reassure that the overall analysis of scientific research in social sciences reflects with some differences the behavior of managerial researchers in Cameroon. If we can consider that managerial CSR begins with its productivity, then expands to a certain number of aspects such as the usefulness of this production passing through the production process which must respond to a certain number of rules of ethics and professional conduct in the profession, we quickly realize that even the most basic criterion which is productivity is far from finding satisfaction. Indeed, African countries in general produce only 2.6% of the world's articles according to the 2015 UNESCO science report.

In Cameroon, the number of publications listed in "Web science" increased from 303 in 2005 to 706 in 2014 (Fomba et al., 2016). These values have undoubtedly progressed but a progression which does not meet expectations, as we can see in the failure of the objective of African countries to allocate, by 2020, 1% of their GDP to research expenditure. . We easily see low researcher productivity caused by a set of factors which all characterize an inadequate framework for the practice of research. In this respect, we can mention the problems of infrastructure, documentation, access to new information and communication technologies, financing, training, etc. while we must analyze some of these factors more closely, it is no less disappointing to note that in 2013, for example, Africa's gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) represented only 1.3%, global value; while Asia and the Americas accounted for 42.2% and 32.4%, respectively (UNESCO, 2015).

In Cameroon, while the national budget has experienced a permanent increase since 2010, going from 2570 billion FCFA in 2010 to 4234.7 billion in 2016, we can see that the share of the budget of the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) never reached 2%. Rather, it experienced a regression going from its highest value, 1.7% in 2010 to its lowest value, 1.13% in 2016. Furthermore, in the distribution of the MINESUP budget, we see that between 2013 and 2016 actions linked to the development of scientific research and innovation are those which received less allocation with a rate which oscillates between 2 and 5.5% (Fomba et al., 2016).

If we look at infrastructure, it appears that despite an increase in the number of state universities from one university in 1993 to eight in 2011, the framework as well as the working conditions of researchers in these structures remain far from satisfactory. A greater number of researchers do not have a work office. Those who have them encounter problems with adequate work equipment. The internet connection is of poor quality or even non-existent. The difficulties with documentation are real with the absence of real libraries, those that exist are poor in content. The digital library remains a myth (Fomba et al., 2016).

If we take a look at training, researchers must from time to time be subjected to capacity building through seminars, conferences and other workshops. The organization of this type of event is rather rare in our context. We also note a crucial lack of affiliation of our universities to scientific exchange forums. The laboratories and research groups supposed to train the youngest are the private and personal initiative of a few masters and remain very insufficiently represented. The supervision ratio is alarming, as it was around 1/61 in 2012. Even today we can see on a list of distribution of thesis supervision published in April 2020 by the University of Yaoundé 2 that some professors are still allocate 64 theses to be supervised for this university alone; when we know that they can have others elsewhere.

The problem of domestic magazines is also significant. The lack of visibility of the few existing journals in Cameroon, as well as their value, contributes to the fact that researchers prefer to submit to foreign journals. If the lack of visibility is due to the fact that it is very rare to be informed about a call for contributions or a national conference, it also lies in the lack of communication about existing publications. In SG where the researcher is supposed to produce knowledge to resolve the problems of his environment, we are entitled to wonder if the ideal would not be local communication of the results of our work.

The preceding analyzes allow us to note that being a researcher dedicated to Cameroon is an achievement and a real will. This desire is also for some encouraged by the change of grade when we know that publication

is one of the conditions for advancement in the careers of teacher-researchers. Many teacher-researchers who find themselves faced with these uncomfortable working conditions and who do not see their interest in overcoming such difficulties prefer to devote themselves to teaching and better to extra-professional activities. However, they resort to research only occasionally and out of pure necessity. Teaching in this case inevitably takes a hit.

Even if the World Bank (2014) believes that the quality of scientific production has significantly improved in sub-Saharan Africa, we believe that in the field of SG, a real scientific revolution is necessary. Greater involvement from the field leading to close collaboration with companies is essential. This is a system that is in line with "Grounded theory" as recommended by Kamdem and Nekka (2019). These authors recommend "Grounded theory" as a research model intended to revolutionize management research in Africa, a continent where everything is to be discovered and demonstrated. This is a very enriching and innovative methodological approach for the construction of theoretical models in the African context. Its particularity is based on its inductive nature, which is supposed to trigger the process of producing knowledge on the real elements of the research field. In this sense, we think it is appropriate to subscribe to this vision in order to deepen the knowledge on SR of the managerial researcher in the Cameroonian context. Future investigations will undoubtedly lead us to an exploratory survey among SG teacher-researchers in order to understand the representation they have of their own SR. The interest of such work would allow us to measure, among other things, the level of knowledge of this concept in our context, but also to redefine RSC according to the teacher-researchers.

Conclusion

This reflection sets the premises for research on CSR in the Cameroonian context. Although we have encountered some work on RSU in general (Ngoloko and Biwolé fouda, 2019), to our knowledge there are no studies, whether theoretical or empirical, on RSC. This is a theme that needs to be explored in our field of SGs in view of the current state of scientific practice in this area. The concept being relatively new, it appears important to begin the investigations with an exploration of the perceptions of teacher-researchers on their own SR. This would make it possible to understand the degree of integration of this concept within the population of management researchers in our context.

Furthermore, having clearly established that there is a real problem in scientific practice in our context today, we believe that confronting the managerial researcher with his responsibilities is more than necessary.

However, this awareness cannot be an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, SR in scientific matters is not a question that concerns only the researcher, but all stakeholders. It is therefore up to the academic community, understood here by those who govern higher education, to put in place genuine university governance in terms of research, in the same way as is done for teaching. Such governance would implement an academic calendar that would be rich and respected in terms of research, a set of standards and codes of ethics and professional conduct as well as a system for evaluating scientific work as recommended by Bornmann (2015).), and no longer those which contribute to satisfying the "publish or perish". Real collaboration between all organizations and the academic sphere is essential if we want to implement research processes such as Grounded theory intended to lead to more performative and therefore more socially responsible management research.

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