

Editorial: The practice of making decisions: from decision models to managing action

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Decision-making has always been the intellectual core of management scholarship (Simon, 1947; Cyert and March, 1963). From early formulations of bounded rationality to contemporary work on heuristics, sensemaking and strategic choice, decisions have been treated as the fundamental mechanism linking cognition, organization and action (see Cristofaro, 2020; Cristofaro *et al.*, 2024). Yet despite this centrality, much of what management scholars publish about decisions – and about the management process more broadly – has shifted away from how decisions are *actioned* in the everyday moments of organizational life. Managers often make decisions under conditions of urgency, ambiguity, political constraints and imperfect information; scholars, by contrast, frequently analyze decisions after the fact, under conditions of conceptual clarity and methodological control. The resulting distance between decision research and decision practice remains one of the most persistent – and least resolved – tensions in the field (Nicolai and Seidl, 2010; Kieser *et al.*, 2015).

Management Decision was also founded to confront this tension between scholarly explanation and managerial action. As the oldest Emerald journal, founded in 1967, its mission has always been to publish scholarship that matters for action (see Randolph-Seng, 2022). However, as the discipline has matured and become increasingly specialized, the space for work that speaks directly to decision-makers – without sacrificing analytical rigor – has narrowed. Practice-oriented contributions are frequently encouraged in principle yet evaluated using criteria designed for conventional empirical research. This misalignment has constrained the visibility, legitimacy and impact of scholarship that engages seriously with decision-making as it unfolds in real organizational settings (Rynes, 2012).

In response to this challenge, we formally introduce *The practice of making decisions*, the newly reframed practice-facing section of *Management Decision*. This repurposed section builds directly on the intellectual foundations of the former *In Motion* initiative (see Chen and Randolph-Seng, 2021). *In Motion* was originally conceived as a dedicated space for scholarship that speaks meaningfully to managerial practice. That vision was subsequently advanced by Dr Wendy Chen, the section's first Senior Associate Editor, who played a central role in institutionalizing the initiative and giving it editorial substance. *The practice of making decisions* stands firmly on the foundation of *In Motion*, while making its purpose, scope and evaluative logic more explicit. The title change is not cosmetic; it signals a deliberate repositioning of the section around decision-making as a tangible entry point for engaging with managerial and organizational practice.

From decision models to managing action

The practice of making decisions reflects a clear intellectual commitment by moving beyond viewing decisions as isolated choice events or static outputs of rational models. Instead, the section prioritizes the work of deciding: framing problems, interpreting information, managing trade-offs, justifying actions, revising commitments and coordinating implementation over time. Research across strategy and organization theory has long demonstrated that decisions are embedded in social systems, shaped by routines, power relations, institutional logics and cognitive limitations (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992; March, 1994). More process-oriented research further demonstrates that decision-making unfolds



over time through iterative sensemaking and interaction rather than in linear stages (Weick, 1995; Langley *et al.*, 2013; Cristofaro, 2022).

Yet, as recent reflections on the theory-practice gap make clear, these insights are often translated into abstract theorizing or generalized prescriptions that remain epistemologically and institutionally distant from the realities of management. Parkhe (2024) argues that this distance is not merely a problem of communication but a deeper epistemological divide between how scholars and practitioners generate, validate and use knowledge. In applied fields such as strategic management, knowledge is inherently fungible – flowing from theory to practice and vice versa – but prevailing academic conventions continue to focus on ex post explanations rather than on engagement with decision-making as it unfolds. As a result, scholarly accounts of decision-making frequently abstract away from urgency, political constraints and incomplete information – the very conditions under which managerial decisions are made.

This revamped section aims to bring management scholarship closer to organizational life by explicitly embracing decision-making as one of the primary portals through which managerial practice, organizational action and intervention become visible and analyzable. We specifically invite contributions that illuminate how managers, leaders and practitioners cope with uncertainty, how heuristics and practices are constructed and adapted in use, how formal tools interact with experience and judgment and how managerial action unfolds across contexts and time (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier, 2011; Kahneman, 2011). Importantly, we also welcome work that treats bounded rationality and constraints not as deficiencies to be corrected but as generative conditions that structure feasible and effective actions (Simon, 1955; Cavarretta and Greco, 2021).

In line with broader calls to rethink what it means for management research to “make a difference,” *The practice of making decisions* aligns with an expanded understanding of impact that goes beyond narrow notions of instrumental relevance. As Wickert *et al.* (2021) emphasize, impactful management research can take multiple forms – practical, societal and educational and policy – provided it influences how organizational actors think, talk or act. From this perspective, engaging seriously with decision-making work is not a dilution of rigor but a reorientation of scholarly ambition: from producing detached explanations to enabling more reflective, responsible and informed decision-making within situated, distributed, performative and embodied contexts of consequence (see Mitchell *et al.*, 2011).

The practice of making decisions is therefore not a venue for simplified advice or anecdotal reflection. Nor is it a repository for abbreviated empirical papers that merely gesture toward practice. It is a space for responsible translation: conceptually disciplined scholarship, empirically informed where appropriate and epistemologically explicit about how insights travel across the porous boundary between research and practice. By foregrounding decision-making action, rather than decision-making models, the section aims to reclaim managerial practice as legitimate and necessary for scholarly inquiry and impact.

Scope and types of contributions

The practice of making decisions is dedicated to contributions that take managerial and organizational practice seriously, examining how action, intervention and judgment unfold in real organizational settings, with decision-making serving as a tangible – though not exclusive – point of entry. The section welcomes a carefully delimited range of manuscripts unified not by method but by orientation: submissions must engage directly with real organizational situations and offer insights that managers, practitioners and decision-makers can recognize, interrogate and act upon.

Consistent with the original design of this article type, acceptable contributions include insightful interviews with CEOs, entrepreneurs, policymakers or other senior practitioners; articles written by practitioners that shed new or different light on managerial or organizational decision challenges; theory- and/or research-informed manuscripts explicitly targeting real-

life interventions and case-based contributions that present a decision dilemma or unresolved puzzle that has been addressed – or remains open to resolution. This list is intentionally non-exhaustive. Contributions may address decision-making in a wide range of contemporary organizational settings, including those shaped by digitalization and artificial intelligence, where new forms of judgment, responsibility and coordination increasingly come into play (Giachino *et al.*, 2025; Neiroukh *et al.*, 2025). *The practice of making decisions* does not solely put priority on manuscripts that offer clear solutions, best practices or prescriptive answers. The section explicitly welcomes contributions that unsettle dominant assumptions, expose blind spots, surface contradictions or advance counterintuitive interpretations of managerial situations, even when these insights complicate action rather than simplify it. Problematizing how decisions are framed, questioned or justified is treated as a form of practical contribution in its own right. What matters is that the manuscript engages both scholarly and practitioner audiences around a concrete managerial or organizational problem rather than around disciplinary debates for their own sake.

Importantly, contributions to this section are defined not only by what they address but also by *how they are written and structured*. As emphasized in work on the conventions and relevance of management research, form is inseparable from substance when scholarship seeks to engage practice (Kelemen and Bansal, 2002). Manuscripts should therefore be concise, focused and written in accessible language, avoiding unnecessary jargon and excessive formalism. Submissions are expected to have a maximum length of 4,000 words and should not replicate the structure of conventional empirical articles if doing so hinders comprehension or relevance. Extended methodological exposition, exhaustive literature reviews and disciplinary signaling should be avoided.

All submitted manuscripts to this section should explicitly address four key elements: (1) articulate a clear central message – explain the main insight that the article seeks to convey; (2) explain why the message matters – make explicit the importance, innovativeness and practical usefulness of the idea; (3) draw on at least one real-life managerial situation, example or case – anchor the argument in practice by allowing readers to recognize the specific decision context; (4) clearly articulate the managerial lessons and implications – specify how the insights go beyond the focal example and how they may be implemented, adapted or critically assessed in other organizational settings.

Empirical material – whether qualitative or quantitative – should be used sparingly, selectively and strategically, and when in service to the decision-making issue at hand, rather than to dominate the narrative in any meaningful way. Conceptual framing should support interpretation and action rather than abstract theorizing, reflecting a broader view of relevance in management research, in which knowledge is valuable not because it is universally generalizable but because it is intelligible, actionable and situated in recognizable practice contexts (Van de Ven, 2007; Nicolai and Seidl, 2010). Authors are encouraged to acknowledge uncertainty, trade-offs and contextual limits but not to retreat into excessive qualification that obscures the core message.

Narrative structure matters. Strong submissions typically open with a decision situation, dilemma or puzzle; develop the argument through focused analysis, dialog or illustrative examples and conclude by explicitly returning to the implications for decision-makers (see, for illustrative examples from the former *In Motion* section, Drake and Chen, 2023; Bastian *et al.*, 2025; Abatecola *et al.*, 2025; Kovach *et al.*, 2025). Visual elements, short sections and vignettes may be used where they enhance comprehension. The aim is not to mimic academic formats but to create a form that facilitates the exchange of insights between scholarly and practitioner communities (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014).

Ultimately, *The practice of making decisions* values contributions that treat decision-making as complex, situated and consequential – and that communicate this complexity in a way that is engaging rather than alienating. The ambition is not to offer simplified recipes or abstract theory but to produce work that is credible to scholars, intelligible to practitioners and genuinely helpful to those who must make decisions under real-world constraints.

How manuscripts in this section will be reviewed

Due to its practice-facing orientation, manuscripts submitted to *The Practice of Making Decisions* must be evaluated using criteria that differ significantly from those applied to standard empirical research articles. Applying conventional review standards – focused primarily on hypothesis testing, methodological completeness or narrow theoretical contributions – risks misjudging the value of manuscripts whose primary aim is to illuminate how decision-making, action and intervention unfold in real organizational settings. Such a mismatch not only undermines the purpose of the section but also risks discouraging responsible, practice-oriented scholarship.

Evaluation in this section is guided by a generative conception of peer review, in which reviewing is understood not merely as gatekeeping but as a form of scholarly stewardship aimed at cultivating ideas with the potential to inform and improve the practice (Cristofaro and Duplat, 2025). Reviewers are therefore expected to assess manuscripts holistically and proportionately, attending first to the significance of the managerial or organizational problem addressed, including its decision-related dimensions. Central evaluative considerations include whether the manuscript engages a consequential and recognizable decision situation; whether its arguments are conceptually coherent and appropriately informed by evidence; whether claims are commensurate with the material used; whether uncertainty, trade-offs and boundary conditions are explicitly acknowledged and whether the insights offered are actionable, responsibly framed, and clearly communicated.

Rigor in this section is defined by explanatory credibility, interpretive discipline and transparency rather than by methodological exhaustiveness. Reviewers play a crucial role in ensuring that practitioner-facing manuscripts do not oversimplify complex phenomena, collapse correlation into causation or present decontextualized prescriptions. At the same time, reviewers should refrain from requesting that authors retrofit submissions into conventional academic articles by adding unnecessary hypotheses, data or formal theorizing that would detract from the manuscript's decision relevance.

Consistent with a developmental and dialogical approach to reviewing (Cristofaro and Duplat, 2025), reviewers are encouraged to engage with manuscripts with curiosity and interpretive generosity before critique, to clearly distinguish between core issues and remediable limitations and to provide actionable, proportionate guidance that helps authors strengthen the contribution without distorting its purpose. The aim is not to enforce disciplinary conformity but to support the responsible translation of insight across the boundary between research and practice.

The guiding evaluative question for reviewers should therefore be: *Does this manuscript credibly advance our understanding of managerial practice, including how decisions, actions and interventions are shaped and can be improved in real organizational settings?* Answering this question requires judgment, reflexivity and care. It also requires a shift in mindset – from policing methodological boundaries to cultivating impactful scholarship that is rigorous in its reasoning, honest about its limits and meaningful for those who must make decisions under real-world constraints (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014).

Looking forward

The Practice of Making Decisions represents a deliberate effort by *Management Decision* to reaffirm its identity at a time when the relevance of management scholarship is under increasing scrutiny. By clarifying expectations for authors and reviewers alike, the section aims to foster work that is analytically rigorous, practically relevant and intellectually honest. The section will be stewarded by Dr Matteo Cristofaro, who will serve as Senior Associate Editor overseeing submissions and guiding the continued development of this practice-facing space within the journal.

Decisions are one of the primary points at which management theory meets consequence. They are where strategies take shape, resources are committed and organizations move from

intention to action. This section exists to ensure that this meeting is neither accidental nor superficial. By returning to the practice of making decisions, *Management Decision* reclaims its founding mission while charting a path forward for scholarship that genuinely matters.

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