

2021 Academic Advance Whitepaper

BRIDGING DIVERSITY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIONS IN MANAGEMENT



Author:

University Lecturer Alexandra Vițelar, Ph.D.

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Introduction

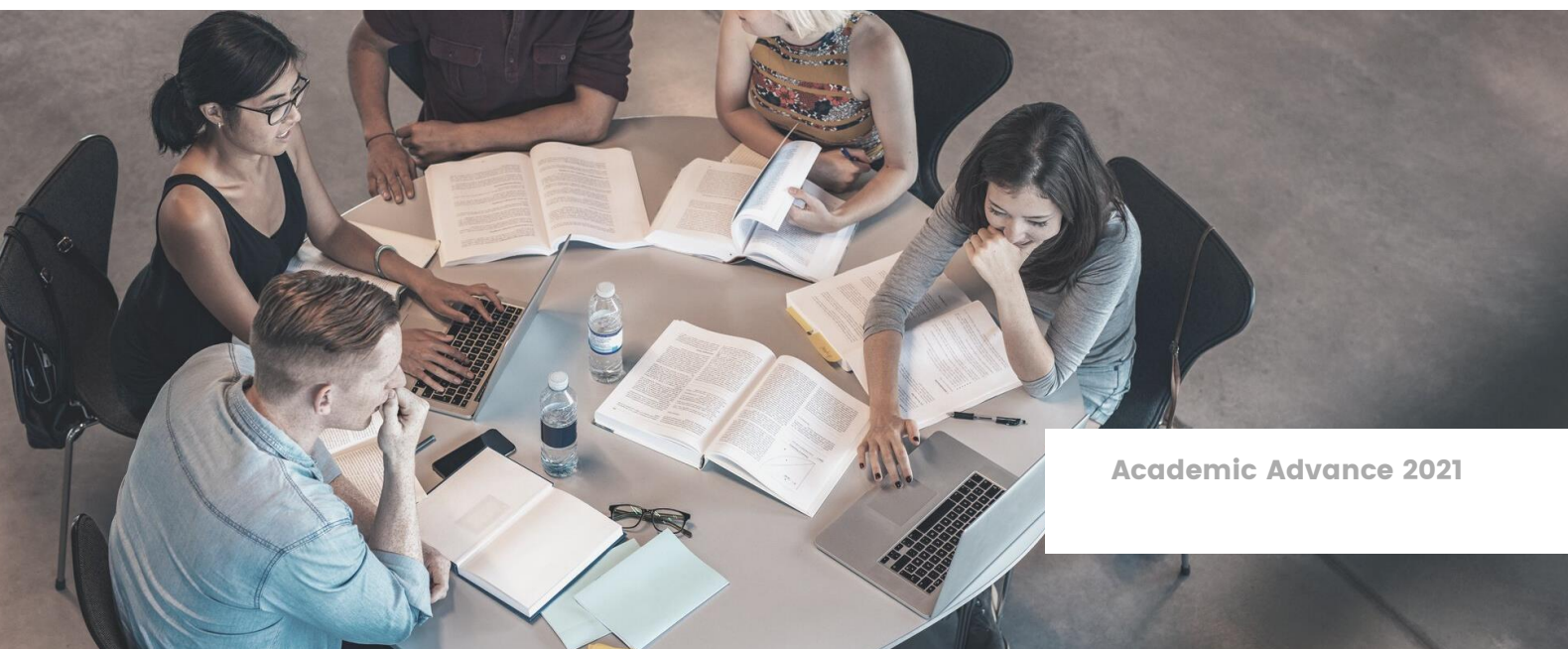
This paper summarizes a workshop organized as part of the Academic Advance Project on the 22nd of October, 2021, at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA).

The roundtable gathered members of academia to discuss the importance of interdisciplinary research and collaborations, particularly in management. The keynote speakers are well-established researchers from Romania with extensive experience in their field. Both Professor Adriana Zaiț, Ph.D., Head of the Doctoral School of the A. I. Cuza University of Iași, and associate professor Loredana Ivan, Ph.D., from National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, have shared from their first hand experience their opinions on interdisciplinary research collaborations.

The workshop discussions were centered on the following topics:

- The relationships among different terms such as interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary
- Interdisciplinary projects: barriers, issues, solutions
- Criteria for choosing interdisciplinary research collaborators
- Ways to encourage interdisciplinary research

Moderator: Professor Florina Pînzaru, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, dean of the Faculty of Management.



Defining interdisciplinarity



There is much debate in the Romanian and international academic environment on the subjects of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, crossdisciplinarity, transdisciplinary research.

Transdisciplinary research became popular at the European Union level with the launch of a critical funding program, Horizon Europe, that tackles solving societal through the collaboration of transdisciplinary teams for a more holistic approach.

This type of collaboration is not something new; in the U.S., they have a different name for this approach: convergence research.

Despite an inevitable overlap between these concepts, it is necessary to understand that the differences are essential, especially while defining and clarifying the research scope and approach.

Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary are buzz words in the research field nowadays, often overlapping concepts but different in practice.

A better understanding of the research approach

In international academic contexts, there is an increased interest in the research topic, no matter the faculty or field a researcher may belong to, the emphasis being put on collaboration, on communication between specialists from different areas, across disciplines or fields. These concepts are buzzwords for any research project, but considering interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary research as the same may lead to failure to acquire research funding. In this sense, a better clarification of the terms is in need:



01 – **Crossdisciplinarity**

Crossdisciplinary research means being an observer. It means having one background field centered around one discipline, for instance, marketing and examining or monitoring what happens in other areas such as sociology.



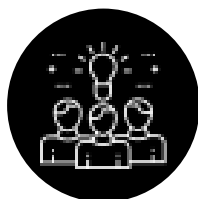
02 – **Multidisciplinary**

Multidisciplinary research is borrowing from other disciplines/fields. It signifies working, collaborating with researchers from different fields, management, economy, sociology, but everybody works with their methods, without really creating new designs but borrowing from various fields.



03 – **Interdisciplinary**

A research project becomes interdisciplinary when team members create specific research designs by putting together instruments from other disciplines and adapting the research methods.



04 – **Transdisciplinary**

Interdisciplinarity is not necessarily defined by the research process itself but rather by the results. In this respect, interdisciplinarity focuses on bringing together more categories of stakeholders to solve a common problem. It could be NGOs, a company's decision-makers, academia, or researchers from different fields working towards a common mutually beneficial purpose.

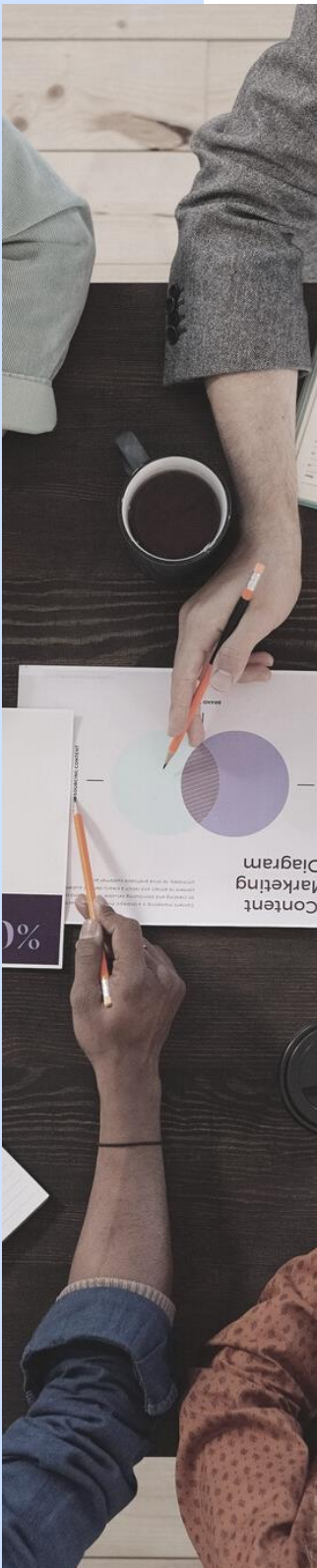
Key takeaways on interdisciplinary research

Loredana Ivan, Ph.D.

Academia is not, and should not be, an "ivory tower"; instead, it should be closer to its stakeholders (communities, organizations, NGOs) and should include its stakeholders in all the activities of the research projects. Stakeholders are not just the receivers of information, but they play an integral role in the research process.

International trends in research

- 01** The focus is not on faculties anymore but on the type of the research topic.
- 02** The focus is put on communication and collaboration between disciplines. This implies that members of academia and research should involve and collaborate in research projects with different stakeholders.



Barriers in interdisciplinary research in Romania

- Institutional regulators and frameworks for research evaluation that discourage interdisciplinarity.
- Evaluation criteria for researchers are skewed.
- Superficial use of buzzwords and labels to mimic involvement.
- Improper state-of-mind: always racing against deadlines, having very little time to consider ideas, self-centered approach.
- Cultural differences.
- Researchers from different fields have trouble understanding one another and view the issue only through their perspective.
- Finding funding.
- Finding a common language with stakeholders, such as business partners.



Interdisciplinary projects: issues & solutions

- The identity of the researcher when specializing in multiple fields. To overcome this issue, the researcher must be clear and concise on their core abilities.
- Socialization in the field - it's easier to engage with people from your area than to seek to extend your network to other fields. It can be overcome with increased exposure to other fields of research
- Stereotyping - lesser value for people in soft sciences compared to those from hard sciences. The solution is better communication, more involvement in understanding the different fields.
- Work ethics - building a solid ethic is essential in every field, especially in international and culturally-different teams.
- Work evaluation in publishing or financing a project: reviewers must be multidisciplinary to offer a complete evaluation method. Another solution is building a team of reviewers with different backgrounds capable of evaluating a project/research.



Criteria for choosing research collaborators

For interdisciplinary projects identifying and selecting the team can frequently be a challenge.

The main criteria considered in this process should be:

- scientific specialization;
- common values outside of scientific specialization; these shared common values foster successful, organic collaboration;
- networking - finding the right people in the proper social context;
- collaboration based on rational criteria such as achievements; regardless of the university or the field, the researcher's achievements may increase their work profile influencing the respect they get from other people.

Researchers

must focus on
networking outside
their field

Researchers appreciate
**connection &
values**



Encouraging interdisciplinary research

Taking into account the current regulatory framework in Romania, it is challenging to promote interdisciplinary research.

The problems that arise, in this context, are twofold, interdisciplinarity being regarded as more rigid when it comes to academia but more flexible in the research field.

There is still a separation between hard and soft sciences in the research field instead of merging them for a more efficient interdisciplinary collaboration.

A simple solution for this that encourages interdisciplinary research would be creating Interdisciplinary Research Centers in Romanian universities. Removing structural barriers by creating such a center can create opportunities for bringing researchers from various fields together in an environment where they can share their ideas and their work.

In the academic field, to encourage interdisciplinary research, the focus should be on the teaching staff and on including Ph.D. students in research projects.



Conclusions

Interdisciplinary research is not a new subject, but it is increasingly gaining importance.



Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research projects are vital in obtaining funding and being more competitive as researchers or institutions.



Finding the right team to collaborate on a project is challenging. Often, the selection process is based on finding common ground, sharing similar values, having a solid work ethic, and, most importantly, networking.



The regulatory system in Romania has many shortcomings when it comes to interdisciplinary projects and collaborations, as the evaluation criteria for academic members are unbalanced.

Research projects and collaborations should engage multiple stakeholders. To achieve impact in the research field, academia must understand the need to develop a common language or ground with stakeholders, consider their needs, and acknowledge that they play a crucial role in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. Merging different fields and closing the gap between researchers with different backgrounds is vital for the economic sciences research field.



***We thank all the workshop participants
for sharing their insights, experience,
and knowledge.***



<http://www.facultateademanagement.ro>
research@facultateademanagement.ro