

# It's about us: Collaboration in the ECRM

## Introduction

I once went to a conference in Queensland, a sunny state in Northern Australia. The opening address was delivered by the local minister for roads in the Queensland government. Addressing the august and attentive audience, he looked around and pointed to the glorious sunshine and glittering swimming pool we could all see outside. "What," he thundered, "are all you silly bastards doing sitting in here when you could be outside enjoying that? Well anyway, have a good conference." That was his total invited address. Hopefully mine will make at least as much sense.

So why are we sitting here when we could be enjoying Caen and Normandie? A blessed relief from the work pressures back home, travel to interesting places and the company of good friends – these are good reasons to attend ECRM.

But we have more serious purposes – to gain new ideas, to test our own and to identify opportunities to collaborate. I would not be here if it weren't for my collaborative colleagues, Marie Ashwin and Alan Hirst, who have very kindly made me very welcome in their research networks.

We take it as axiomatic that collaboration is desirable and useful to our research careers. But what are the arguments in favour of collaboration and which are against? Well, here are some suggestions in favour of research collaboration. Wray (2002) claims that collaboration occurs because teams are better able to access scarce resources needed by researchers. Indeed if you are building the large hadron collider at a cost of \$7.5 billion Euros, that may make sense. May I suggest that in our domain, research projects are not funded at that level. And indeed Wray shows that physical sciences have higher rates of collaboration than the social sciences. But even here he showed that around 75% of papers in cognitive psychology were co-authored. When I looked at the 2010 editions of the *European Journal of Marketing* I found 85% of the 81 papers were co-authored. In contrast, of the 40 papers in the *European Management Journal* 68% were co-authored. So collaboration is rife, though variable, in European business research too. But multi-million, let alone multi-billion projects, are not a plausible explanation for our collaborative efforts in business research. We're cheap!

In fact, Wray suggested there were five main reasons for collaboration. First, collaboration is said to increase the quality of research. Certainly teams have the opportunity for on-going internal peer review, plus the ability to expand the pool of expertise in areas like analysis or subject matter knowledge. Wray presents some evidence that multi-author articles are disproportionately often cited compared with their lone (or is that lonely?) authored papers.

Second, Wray observes that collaboration opens opportunities not available to individuals. Grants can be shared and data can be collected in the many locations of the co-authors either within or without Europe. Thagard (1997) claims that collaboration increases "explanatory" coherence – in other words, knowledge is gained by authors workshoping

findings and spurring each other on to better and more insightful concepts and theories. Thagard's paper amusingly was published in the journal *Noûs* – surely a multilingual play on words indicating both knowledge and collaboration.

Third, says Wray, the findings in multi-authored papers are more likely to be remembered, both because there are more memories around and also because the more the outcomes are discussed the better embedded in memory they become ... and probably more often cited and the more often noted in textbooks.

Fourth, collaboration seems to lead to greater productivity among researchers. Those with the most collaborations were typically more successful in their careers. Wray also claimed that collaboration has accelerated the growth in knowledge. Enabling technologies such as the internet and electronic journal databases give support to that view. Wray noted the emergence of “invisible colleges” of colleagues who typically work together, form specialisations and get many papers out. But in business research, more than three authors is considered uncommon, unlike the physical sciences who typically include many more authors on shorter papers. Collaboration is also affected by reward schemes in academic institutions. In my university, we originally computed research outputs by dividing each individual's share of publications. Single authorship meant a 100% share. Including other authors who only had a peripheral role diminished share and hence militated against collaboration. Now every collaborator gets to count each publication as their own – encouraging collaboration and larger teams.

Fifth and finally, Wray notes the role collaboration plays in encouraging the development of new researchers who join established teams. I suspect in business research, this is less common than in physical sciences where programs of research are on a grander and longer time scale. Wray observed that collaborative teams tended to persist where researchers were epistemic equals, that is, the main players overall made a similar contribution to knowledge. That stands to reason, people who are, to use a vulgar term, parasitic of the work of others may find themselves excluded from teams.

Wray also pointed to some risks with collaboration. The first is the diffusion of responsibility for knowledge development. He also talked about the demotivating effect that collaboration can have on some individuals in teams. We only have to see what happens when we give our students group assignments to see these processes at work. The Voice Group (2008), a research consortium that uses that title, not individual author names and who are active in qualitative marketing research note the stresses caused by the politics and emotions of teamwork. You put three or more humans together, I suggest, and such fraught outcomes are likely. They require good management and leadership skills by those in the role of being first among equals. Wray also points to a bias among funding agencies towards greater levels of collaboration. In 2009 five of us applied for a FP7 grant from the European Union. I was staggered that one of the criticisms of our application that was that the collaboration “only” involved researchers in five countries in the EU – an example of this “more must be better” way of thinking.

Next, Wray points to the danger that the “invisible colleges” become more like the college of cardinals – reserving power and funding to themselves, thus making it harder for outsiders to join the college club and get funding. I certainly see elements of this in my own country's grant funding system where past “reputation” makes or breaks a grant

application. Undoubtedly you also see this in your systems. For example, Mattsson (et al., 2010) noted that most of the EU FP7 funding in life sciences goes to collaborative groups, but they tend to be geographically adjacent and to exclude non-European countries.

So given these issues, what patterns of collaboration can we observe within the ECRM? I want to share with you an analysis we have made of ECRM 2010 and 2011. Who works with whom? What countries partner? It's a European conference – so what about interlopers like me from outside its boundaries? Is there evidence of recidivists (or is that re-conference ists ) who return to the scene of past crimes (that is, past conferences)? Let's have a look at what we can find.

## **Papers and Posters 2010 and 2011**

First, let's examine some basic data. This is based on the first three authors. Apologies, I have left out authors four and beyond – though this was rare anyway. This is a neat conference, just 75 papers and posters spread over two days. But a big difference this year is fewer authors for the papers, suggesting a decline in collaboration since last year.

## **Author Honour Roll**

Yes, we have re-conference-ists. Of the three first authors on any paper, the Honour roll shows only 20 names that appear in both years. Now some may attend and not present. Is this a typical pattern? If so, do people attend to find collaborators, then work with them away from the conference? Would we like to have the same people back each year?

## **Gender**

Of the authors, the majority are female with no clear bias as to who is first or second author.

## **Methodology**

Here is a view of “methodology” defined as the philosophy of inquiry. We only have data from 2010, but 2011 looks similar. Largely this is a qualitative conference, but positivists and mixed methodologists like me are allowed in too.

## **Qualitative Methods**

Here are the qualitative methods used. Again, we only have data for 2010. Case studies and individual in-depth interviews predominate. But we also see some use of projective and elucidation techniques, like photo sorts.

## **Quantitative Methods**

Here are the comparable data for quantitative methods. Surveys dominate, but other papers also focus on analysis techniques. There are few experiments.

## **Other Methods**

Quite a few papers are conceptual and others subscribe to mixed methods. A few are about matters epistemological and methodological.

## **Keywords**

We found over 200 keywords used in 2010. I have enclosed them in the Word file that accompanies this address if you would like to see them.

## **Collaboration**

### **Collaboration 2010 & 2011**

Now let's look at collaboration more directly. Of the 148 papers, nearly half are sole authored. This is a surprisingly high figure to me, especially if you look at social science journal articles where I guesstimate this would be no higher than 10 to 15 percent. Perhaps ECRM functions as a sort of "speed dating" service where you out on display what you have to offer to prospective partners – or should I use some other equally egregious metaphor? Or perhaps some authors are proudly single?

Hopefully what is going on here is actually innovation – ECRM offers a forum to test new ideas and approaches. Certainly when we read the ECRM papers we see some quite radical methods and methodologies.

More research is needed here, don't you think?

## Region of Authors

Well, this is a European conference, that's what you would expect, with a slightly higher proportion of European authors this year than last.

## Top Ten Countries

Now we get a rather different view of the ECRM. The UK dominates, followed by Australia. With Malaysia, South Africa, India and the USA where much or all of the language of instruction is English, this presents a very Anglo view of ECRM. I'm a UK citizen, but live in Australia. It's wonderful to be welcomed here, but where are all the other Europeans? Are we missing on the opportunity to mix minds, metaphors and methods?

To take a myopic perspective for a moment, there is a downturn in Australian participation this year at the very time when (for Australians) the Australian \$ exchange rate is at historical highs against the Euro. Alas, Australia has just suffered its equivalent of the RAE, called ERA (Excellence in Research Australia) which has led to many universities banning conference papers and penalising staff for submitting them. So what universities will now fund is crucial to the survival of ECRM and like conferences. In Europe, we have seen Business Schools slashing funding for business research and conferences.

So what is the value of ECRM to us personally and our universities? Can we protect its future?

## Two Author Collaboration

The chart lists the country of the first author. We see overwhelmingly that when collaboration occurs, it is within the same country. However, there is more cross-institutional collaboration. So are these people who have previously worked together, then moved on – or is there some other mechanism? We don't know.

## Three or More Collaboration

Mainly collaboration occurs in house and in the same country. Perhaps it is too difficult to organise otherwise when the numbers get large.

## What Might we Collaborate About?

We wanted to look at key themes and concepts used in the conference. I took the abstracts from 2010 and the paper and poster titles from both 2010 and 2011. The 2011 abstracts were not available, so there is a natural bias to 2010 in the results I'll show you. Before I did the analysis, I removed obvious words like "research" and "this paper" as they contribute little extra information in this context.

I used Leximancer software. This is an inductive analysis procedure that looks for the proximity between key words and concepts, creating an interesting visual map.

Let's see what happened.

## The ECRM Concept Map

Key organising themes are shown on the left. Essentially "data" connects to all the other themes, whereas the further you go down the list, the fewer the connections.

Evidently we are interested in our raw data as well as our methods to collect and analyse it. We are in the business domain and interested in work and organisations. Consumers and non-profits do not get much attention. Finally there is a strand about teaching research to higher degree by research students.

## Include More Minor Themes

That's more detail here, but it is harder to interpret.

## Concepts

Another way to look at the data is to focus on the concepts – basically these are subservient to the main themes and mostly connected to a single theme. As you might expect, there is a lot of emphasis on method and techniques here – after all, this is the ECRM! Other parts are about substantive topics – business and organisations are prominent among them.

## Concept Cloud

Concept clouds are now common, with the bigger the font the more important the theme. Concepts are clustered around the theme. This is another viewpoint of the same data.

So having seen all this, we should now be armed with knowledge of what is presented at ECRM, the specific topics of interest and the methodologies of preference. So what does this mean for the future of collaboration?

## Future Collaborations at ECRM

We know from the work of Wray and others that collaboration is efficient in terms of outputs and helps build citations and careers.

But we also see at ECRM that the potential for collaboration is mostly untapped. This is especially so between countries. Even cross-institutional collaboration could be better. There are people out there interested in what you are doing and willing to work with you! Some of them are in this room as I speak. I suggest to the 2012 organisers at the University of Bolton organisers that they consider ways to foster collaboration and reunions of past participants.

Let's do some simple maths. Assume 90 participants at ECRM. That gives us 4005 possible pairs of collaborators in teams of 2. And if you can manage teams of 3, there are 117,000 possible teams. If each team produced just one paper there would be thousands of academics beating down the door wanting to be a part of the action at ECRM!

Well maybe not quite so many papers will be produced, but I do urge you to seek out and listen to all the wonderful ideas your colleagues have to offer, form academic liaisons and multiply. It's interesting, it's fun and it's immensely rewarding.

And above all else enjoy everything that ECRM and Caen has to offer!

## References

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## Keywords ECRM Conference 2010

accounting conservatism	demand analysis	household survey	new method	REF 2013
action research	dental services	ICT	non response	reflective thinking
actor network theory	dialogism	individual cultural values	novice researcher	relationship quality
adaptive conjoint analysis	dignity	individual growth modelling	observation	repurchase intention
aerospace industry	disabilities	INDSERV	on line research	research design
arts based research	ebook management	induction	ontology	Research interviews
asesment tool	economy	information systems	organisational behaviour	research mentors
Assessment of data collection methods	ecotourism	information systems development	organisational capability development	research method selection
Autobiography	effectuation	innovative teaching methods	organisational change	Research methodology
Autodriving	effort reward imbalance	interaction environment	organisational climate survey	research methods
automative and aerospace industry	elearning	interaction maps	organisational learning	resect
B2B	emanctionipa	intervention	organisational structure	rich pictures
balanced scorecard	emergence	intuition	organisations	safety culture
behavioural intervention	employer satisfaction	involvement	paper survey	safety intevention
best practice in business	employment relationship	IT	path analysis model	secret data
Blogs	enterprise systems	job satisfaction	perceived research proficiency	semiotics
business angels	entrepreneurship	job selection criteria	phenomenology	sensitizing
business ethics	entrepreneurial marketing	knowledge	philosophy	shopping decisions
business research	environment	learning styles	photo elicitation	Skype/VoIP
business takeover	epistemology	longitudinal	pictograms	small business
businning ness planning	ethnographic interview	luxury brands	pilot studies	small to medium enterprises
CAQDAS	ethnography	luxury consumer behaviour	place branding	SMEs
card game methodology	evaluation	management and IT	post graduate education	social phenomena in business
card sorting	evaluation criteria	mandatory disclosure	post graduate students	social research
case study	experiential learning	marketing strategy management	power relations	social semiotics
case study research	external validity	MCDM	practice based research	statistical tools
Categorisation	factors' constraints	mental health	primary data	story telling

Census	field research	mental healthcare	projective prompts	strategy as practice
classical drawing	field trips	metadiscipline	psychological contracts	structural equation modelling
clinical research	financial standards	mind mapping	public and private sector	students as respondents
collaborative teaching	focus group methodology	mixed method	push factors	superior hotels
community of practice	Foucault's discourse analysis	mixed methods research	qualitative	survey research methodology
contextual enquiry	generalisation	mixed research methods	qualitative methods	synthesis
contingent reward	GIS	multi national enterprises	qualitative research	systems theory
country of origin culture	graduates	multi site effects	quality management	tacit knowledge
customer knowledge management system	grounded theory	multilingual effects	quality of working life	teaching methods
customer relationships	healthcare	multiple objective linear programming	quantification	technology
DBA	hermeneutic	N vivo	quantitative	telco
decision making	higher education	national cultural values	RAE 2008	theoretical sensitivity
déjà vu research method	household portfolio theory	neo institutional theory	RandD	theory of planned behaviour