# Human Rights in the Management Literature: Leading Publications and Research Agenda

## Direitos Humanos na literatura de Administração: Análise de Publicações e Proposição de uma Agenda de Pesquisa

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## Abstract

This paper identifies and examines leading publications on human rights within the management literature. For that, we used features of a bibliometric analysis – specifically exploring product and impact indicators – in order to identify the leading publications on human rights that were examined aiming to portray how the issue has been addressed within this field. Moreover, by identifying the key articles and concepts adopted by the leading publications, this paper offers an interpretation of the academic context that enabled the emergence of a human rights approach within the management field. Thus, a contribution of this paper is to highlight how the debate on human rights in management has been strengthened, identifying articles and journals that can be a source of reference for future research. Our study has identified a shift in the discussion regarding human rights. During the last decade the topic, which was initially focused on the role of states in guaranteeing human rights, has started to examine the relationship between organizations and society. Such transformation has placed human rights as both, a responsibility and a duty of corporations. It is suggested that the literature on ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) was the entrance for a human rights approach within management literature. However, the discipline has already engaged in elaborating different interpretation of human rights. Our research shows the potential of human rights in consolidate a research agenda on corporate impact in our societies.

*Keywords:* Human rights; Management studies; Ethics; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Bibliometric studies.


**Resumo**

O objetivo deste trabalho é identificar a produção acadêmica sobre direitos humanos no campo da administração. Para isso, utilizamos características de uma análise bibliométrica - especificamente explorando indicadores de produção e impacto - para identificar as principais publicações sobre direitos humanos que foram examinadas com o objetivo de retratar como o problema foi abordado neste campo. Além disso, ao identificar os principais artigos e conceitos adotados pelas principais publicações, este trabalho oferece uma interpretação do contexto acadêmico que permitiu o surgimento de uma abordagem de direitos humanos no campo da administração. Assim, uma contribuição deste artigo é destacar como o debate sobre os direitos humanos foi fortalecido em administração, identificando artigos e revistas que podem ser uma fonte de referência para futuras pesquisas. Nosso estudo identificou uma mudança na discussão sobre direitos humanos. Durante a última década, o tópico, inicialmente focado no papel dos estados na garantia dos direitos humanos, começou a examinar a relação entre organizações e sociedade. Essa transformação colocou os direitos humanos como ambos, uma responsabilidade e um dever das corporações. Sugere-se que a literatura sobre ética e responsabilidade social corporativa (CSR) seja a entrada para uma abordagem de direitos humanos na literatura de administração. No entanto, a disciplina já se dedicou a elaborar diferentes interpretações de direitos humanos. Nossa pesquisa apresenta o potencial dos direitos humanos em se consolidar como uma agenda de pesquisa focada na análise do impacto das corporações em nossas sociedades.

*Palavras-chave:* Direitos humanos; Estudos de administração; Ética; Responsabilidade Social Corporativa (RSC); Estudos bibliométricos.

**Introduction**

Human rights can be used in different contexts, expressing a wide range of meanings. Such polysemy stems from the variety of issues that it could cover – such as refugee and war situations, fight against poverty and for equality or access to health and education – but also due to the various fields of knowledge that human rights could draw upon – as legal studies, politics, philosophy or international relations. Since the human rights debate is spreading in management studies, we wanted to understand how the term crossed the bridge to the field. This paper identifies and examines leading publications on human rights in management. In order to do that, we employed bibliometric tools.

The emergence of human rights in the international arena is related to the need to strengthen common rules of operation, especially with regard to respect for human dignity. A landmark on such debate is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which could be considered a general framework for discussing the theme. Even though some might consider human rights as a relatively recent idea, management interest over it is increasing fast. Some authors say that it is mainly due to the relative loss of power by nation-states to rule over a world with borders that are more fluid and were non-state actors emerge as powerful actors (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Others will add that this is a consequence not of any kind of globalization, but one embedded on the expansion of neoliberalism, which requires forms of regulation to legitimize such shift of power from state to the market (Levi-

Faur, 2005). We may also point to the outcome of a globalized world, and its transnational organizations that creates global supply chains and spaces of governance. For example, a multinational corporation would outsource its production to East Asia. Regardless the human rights violation of its supplier, its goods will be sold in the European market. At the same time, transnational social movements campaigning around the world, tracked its global supply chains for human rights violations, once evidence is found, it is exposed to public scrutiny. This scenario transforms human rights into a reputational risk to the multinational organization. Thus, in a global context in which more transnational organizations engage with human rights, greater is the need to 'manage' human rights.

Aiming to examine how management literature has been engaging with human rights topics, we conducted a bibliometric research. This technique of data collection and analysis enables to observe knowledge production and dissemination within a certain field of knowledge or other social media outlets (Vanti, 2002; De Bellis, 2009; Ferreira, 2010). Besides bibliometrics, other sub-disciplines that are part of information science has been used for several areas with similar purposes to this study (Araujo, 2006; De Bellis, 2009).

Therefore, our research has identified the main publications on human rights in the field of management, while observing how the issue has been addressed. It also identifies the key works and concepts, developing an interpretation of the academic context that such discussion emerged from. Thus, a contribution of this paper is to highlight how the debate on human rights in the management field has emerged and has been strengthened, examining articles and journals that are engaged in the debate.

Although the term *human rights* evoke a juridical-legal perspective, it has consolidated in the management area: the discipline is already elaborating different interpretations of human rights. Our study has identified a shift in the production on human rights. During the last decade the topic, which was initially focused on the role of states in guaranteeing human rights, has incorporated a reflection on the relationship between organizations and society. Such transformation has placed human rights as both, a responsibility and a duty of corporations. The literature on ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) was the entrance hall for the human rights topic in management literature. By using the human rights issue as a background to understand the relationship between businesses and societies, a specific area of research within management has been consolidated, as concepts and approaches are developed.

This paper is divided into four sections, besides this introduction. The next section presents a theoretical approach regarding human rights and management. Then we present the methodology that discusses bibliometric research and data collection. The following section analyses the evolution of the production of human rights in administration, highlighting production and impact indicators. Finally, we present the conclusions and some consideration about the research.

## Literature review

It is not uncommon to associate multinational corporations (MNC) with disrespect of human rights. It is possible to reflect about MNC's responsibilities over such accusations, examining whether human rights breaches are a consequence of management rationale, such as the lack of enforcement of responsible practices over the supply chain, economic incentives or calculated risk (Ruggie, 2013). Campaigns associating MNC and human rights violations are not a recent phenomenon as one might consider. In the early 1950s, a divestment campaign began in South Africa, which gained momentum in the 1980s, urging consumers, shareholders, states and companies to boycott South African companies or withdraw their investments from South Africa due to the apartheid regime (Crawford and Klotz, 1999).

Although the notion of human rights is still strongly associated with the obligations of nation-states regarding basic rights, the human rights field has changed as well as society and capitalism. Throughout the years, the responsibility of large corporations in relation to protection and non-infringement of rights has been receiving more attention in the human rights field. Such shift could be traced to the 1970's, and it is a consequence of the blurred boundaries of nation-sates and the emergence of transnational organizations (i.e. MNC), which decreased the relative power of nation-states in regulating companies' behavior, especially regarding command and control type of regulation. Additionally, globalization of the economy created a context in which MNC could act in countries where accountability of organizations actions and their human rights responsibilities' had not yet been received comprehensive regulations (Scherer e Palazzo, 2011).

This does not mean that nation-state has lost its relevance. It only demonstrates that 21st century capitalism has transnational characteristics. Therefore, the nation-state is another actor in a world in which governance elements have become increasingly important (Djelic and Sahlin-Anderson, 2006; Kristensen and Morgan, 2012). Such transnational characteristic stems from the fact that, in contemporary capitalism, it is difficult to separate what concerns exclusively to a territorial division of a country, from what crosses nations' boundaries and takes place in different jurisdictions (Djelic and Sahlin-Anderson, 2006). No wonder that two features of contemporary capitalism are global production chains and the financialization of social relations (Kristensen and Morgan, 2012). These phenomena contribute to the growth of the importance of regulating corporations in the world.

A transnational world implies the establishment of specific rules aimed to deal with interactions that no longer occur among nation-states, but also comprises other organizations, such as MNC and transnational social movements, interacting in a transnational arena of governance (Djelic and Sahlin-Anderson, 2006). In this context, power and authority are not limited to national borders, hence resembling a patchwork of interactions, under which organizations – including nation-states – need to negotiate in the pursuit of their interests. The result is a re-regulated world, where new forms of regulation arise beyond national legislation, which is confined to national borders (Ruggie, 1983; Djelic and Sahlin-Anderson, 2006).Certifications mechanisms, which emerge in both national and global arenas (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council – MSC and Forestry Stewardship Council – FSC) and agreements among corporations, such as the UN Global Pact or the Ecuador Principles, are examples of such phenomena.

It is not surprising that the same occurs in the human rights field. Especially after the publication of the *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* (ONU, 2011), lights were shed on the role of companies and other organizations in the assurance of human rights. Currently, this norm joins other regulations that are still being updated, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* ([1976] 2011), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) *Sustainability Principles and Performance Standards* (IFC, 2012) and the *International Organization for Standardization* (ISO) 26000, which takes human rights into consideration (ISO, 2010). Thus, there is a favorable environment for regulations establishing a comprehensive framework on the role of companies in relation to human rights (Ruggie, 2014).

Ruggie (2013) argues that States' sovereignty should be respected as well as their responsibilities in relation to the respect and guarantee of human rights. However, with the increasing importance of transnacional companies and organizations, one cannot ignore the duty of companies regarding not violating human rights, but also ensuring that they do not contribute or benefit from human rights violations that may have been committed. Accordingly, the UN proposal goes beyond the idea that corporations should do go through

CSR, and refrain from acting irresponsibly, they also have to do their best to avoid unintentional damage to other (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Ruggie (2013) understands that state and companies are both responsible for ensuring measures for reparation in case of violations or acts committed without attention to a due process.

Still, this study does not place human rights as a panacea. To prevent violations, which usually occurs in complex environments, it takes more than just signing treaties. As pointed out by Banerjee (2014), there is a risk that companies avail themselves of signing commitments to obfuscate violations, labeled as *bluewashing* (in reference to the UN colour), such behavior aims to create a distance between the company and human rights' violations plus increase brand value.

This research shows that human rights topic has gained importance under the management field. Possibly, this reflects (and derives from) the signing of the aforementioned agreements and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms. Moreover, it can be seen a growing interest in the topic, especially after the 2008 financial crisis, which may have increased the sensitivity to ethics in organizational practices in all dimensions. To some extent, the discussion regarding human rights and business borders the theme of corporate social responsibility. However, it could go further: while the latter consists of a set of actions taken voluntarily by organizations, the first concerns the inalienable responsibilities of states and companies in general. Thus, the path taken seems to be slowly directing towards the establishment of minimum criteria on human rights that may serve as a guide for companies' actions, but also to demand action (Rasche and Gilbert, 2012). This proposal, then, goes beyond the idea of a bottom line of not acting irresponsibility but highlights that this is a risk that organizations should avoid (Lin-Hi & Muller, 2013).

## Method

It has become easier to follow the development of a field of knowledge, including the symbolic use of their expressions and concepts, through the statistical analysis of bibliometrics (De Bellis, 2009). The expansion of information science and technology provides different approaches to analyze the development of the disciplines of knowledge, creating forms of measurement and evaluation of the progress of science and its information flows (Vanti, 2002; De Bellis, 2009). While it is possible to say that the goal of the different fields and metrics are, in some way, related to analyzing, quantifying and measuring the flow of knowledge communication, either for analytical or administrative purposes (Vanti, 2002; De Bellis, 2009), the sub-disciplines differ with regard to the limitation of the object being measured, as well as the different factors and variables adopted for such measurement (Vanti, 2002; De Bellis, 2009).

However, the pragmatic goal of understanding the development of a theme within a given field of knowledge define a few quantitative indicators that enable to examine the historical context of its emergence (De Bellis, 2009). One of the pioneering studies that helped pave the meaning of the term 'bibliometrics' was written by Alan Pritchard (1969) at the end of the 1960s (De Bellis, 2009). Pritchard (1969: 349) affirms that the term bibliometrics "will be used explicitly in all studies which seek to quantify the processes of written communication and will quickly gain acceptance in the field of information science." Thus, one can understand that a bibliometric study uses mathematical and/or statistical methods for analyzing bibliographic references. In this sense, bibliometric studies enable a deeper understanding of the quality of academic production in a specific area of knowledge, since quantitative analysis can provide strategic information on the behavior of scientist of that area (Campos, 2003; De Bellis, 2009).

Furthermore, Boyack et al. (2002) point out that bibliometric studies can be broken down into two levels of analysis: (i) the macro, in order to identify the basic structural units of a science on a global scale, and; (ii) the micro, which seeks to identify the state of the art of a specific disciplinary domain. In this sense, quantitative analysis paves the way to examine an area of knowledge trajectory, which is the very objective of this study.

There are several available indicators for conducting a bibliometric analysis (Bradford, 1949; Spinak, 1996; Vanti, 2002; De Bellis, 2009). In this sense, Mugnaini *et al.* (2004, p.125) termed the possible indicators such as: (i) input - investments in R & D, number of researchers and research groups; (ii) process - conferences and science fairs; (iii) product - published articles, patents; (iv) impact - number of citations, patents, royalties.

To identify the leading publications on human rights in management, while identifying the most influential articles in order to support an analysis of the area, two sorts of indicators were chosen: (i) production indicators (e.g. the published articles) and; (ii) impact indicators (e.g. number of citations and impact factor). Examining the impact indicators enables to shift from a quantitative analysis of scientific production to a cognitive analysis of the trajectory of a given area of knowledge, as they are a direct way to identify relevant papers - that is, the most cited ones - in a particular field, as well as intellectual relationship among them (De Bellis, 2009).

Different factors outside the academic world can determine the appearance and the importance of a theme. A bibliometric analysis carried out by production and impact indicators offers the possibility of understanding of the most influential articles, as well as the theme's trajectory and its development within the academic context. This approach enables a cognitive analysis of such trajectory, offering the opportunity to interpret the social construction of a given subject in the academic context.

## Database and refinements

We have adopted the Thompson Reuters Web of Science Database (WoS), as the universe, due to its scope and recognition in the international scientific community and its use in similar studies (Albort-Moran & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Ferreira, Santos, Almeida & Reis, 2014; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Palácio-Marques, 2016). The WoS is an academic platform that provides access to indexed journals, as well as tools to analyze and manage researches carried out on the database (Bordons & Zulueta, 1999). Such tools include the number of citations of a given article over time and the Journal Citation Report (JCR), a measure of impact and influence of Thomson Scientific, which owns the ISI (Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Palácio-Marques, 2016).

Among the existing areas in WoS platform, three subject categories were selected: *management; business and; public administration*. It was understood that from these areas it would be possible to identify the publications in the field of management. Accordingly, scientific journals were identified in each of these areas defined above, and those were sorted by area.

When analyzing scientific journals in each of these areas, we opted for the exclusion of the field of social issues, since their journals configured a thematic shift in relation to the objectives of this study. Thus, we only kept journals in the business, management and public administration fields, totaling a set of about three hundred scientific journals (e.g. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Public Administration Review*, *Policy and Politics*, *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Annals*).

The second step was choosing the term to research. Since it is an international database, we decided to search the term "human rights" in the field "topic" (which includes the title, abstract and keywords) in the selected journals. This criterion yielded a sample of

710 publications. The third sample refinement criteria were the exclusion of all publications that were not scientific articles, and therefore, not necessarily went through the double blind review process (i.e. editorials, reviews, summaries, etc.). The result reached 413 scientific articles.

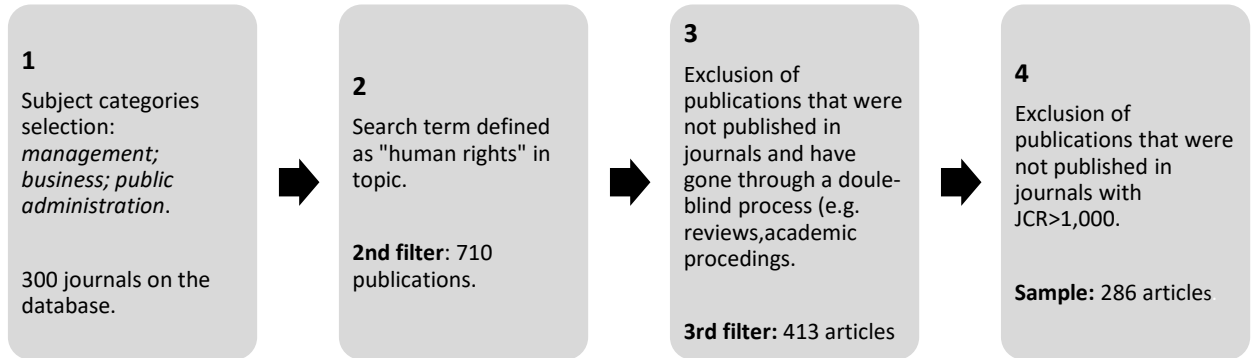| **1** Subject categories selection: *management; business; public administration.* 300 journals on the database. | **2** Search term defined as "human rights" in topic. **2nd filter**: 710 publications. | **3** Exclusion of publications that were not published in journals and have gone through a doule-blind process (e.g. reviews,academic procedings. **3rd filter:** 413 articles | **4** Exclusion of publications that were not published in journals with JCR>1,000. **Sample:** 286 articles |

Figure 1 – Methodological path

**Source:** Elaborated by the authors, 2017.

In turn, the fourth and final refinement aimed to select the items relevant to the scientific community in the management field. Such delimitation took place through the setting of a minimum value for the JCR impact factor. Therefore, we excluded articles whose journals had impact factor less than 1,000 and those not indexed in JCR. After this process performed manually using Web of Science data, 286 scientific articles remained, constituting the sample of publications examined in this research. Figure 1 below illustrates such methodological path:

**Discussion**

The research framework presented in the previous section resulted in a sample of 286 scientific articles. This section examines such sample in order to elaborate and analyze the academic production on human rights topics. Following such examination, the most influential paper will be identified and reviewed.

A temporal analysis of this sample shows that the first article was published back in 1977. However, the discussion in the area effectively begins in 1986 when seven articles on the topic were published - six of them in a special issue of *Policy Studies Journal (PSJ)*. After this peak, during the next 14 years, the number of publication did not exceed four articles in its most productive year (i.e. 2000). This picture started changing from the 2000s on, the decade in which an average of 10 publications per year was achieved. In the time series presented, the year 2009 shows the peak in number of publications, reaching 33 items, with a strong presence of articles published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*. Figure 2 below shows the publications per year:
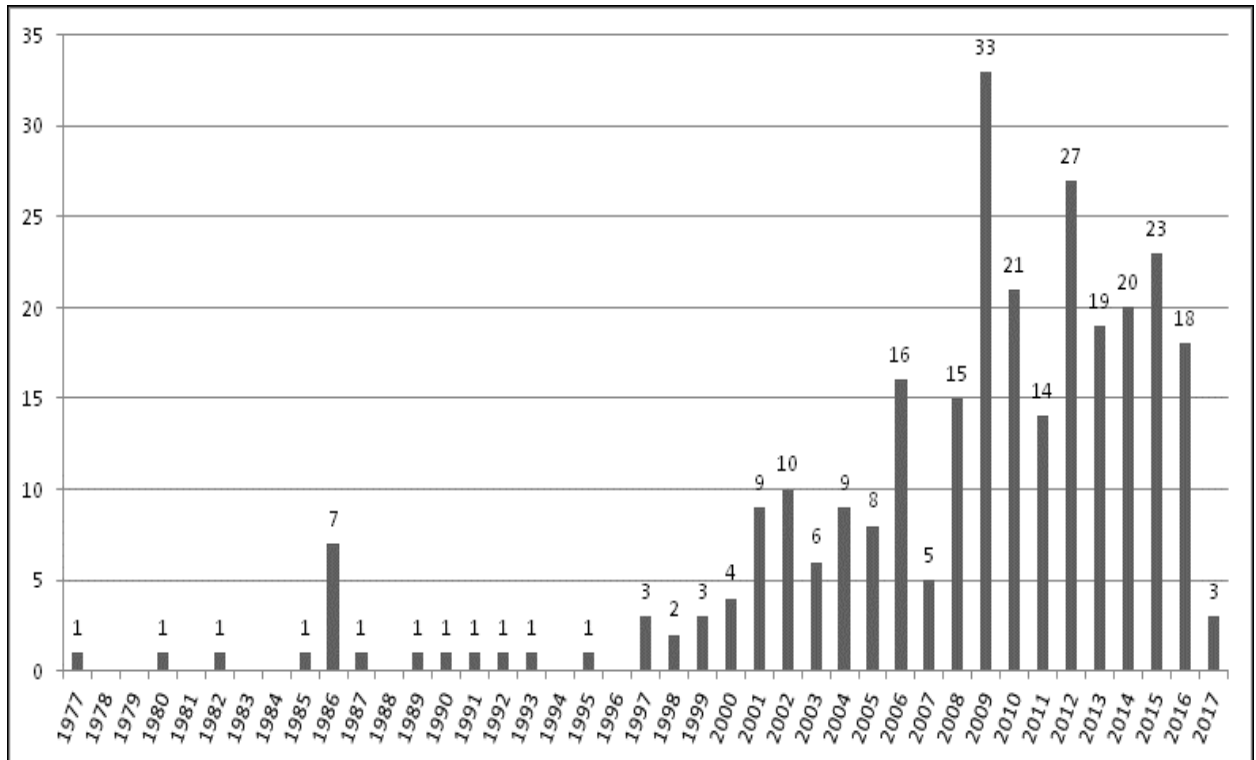
Figure 2 – Publications per year
**Source:** Elaborated by the authors with Web of Knowledge data, 2017.

In comparison with other areas of knowledge, a quick search – without refining procedures – points out that in law field (Government Law), which the human rights issue is consolidated and frequent, the first article published on such topic was in 1956, that is, 21 years before. On the contrary, in management field, although it is possible to note the increase of publications related to the theme, this expansion is erratic and does not show a trend, since it has peaks, such as the one in 2009, and gaps, as 2007 – when only five articles were published, even when the year before had witnessed a rise in publications. Figure 3 below offers an alternative angle to such production, by examing the articles published by decade.

Sorting by decades helps understand its evolution in management field. Despite not having been observed an incremental trend per year, this does not necessarily mean that the interest in the human rights topic is not increasing. Thus, a ten-year cut, rather than yearly, can point whether the issue has consolidated in the field.

Following this ten-year track record, we noted that while only a single article was published in the 1970s, twelve were published in the following decade, which configures an expansion although not very significant. In the 1990s, only thirteen articles were published. However, in the 2000s, a significant increase in the number of publications was observed, totaling 115 articles. Although the decade of 2010 is yet to be finished, by early 2017 145 articles had already been published.

Therefore, there is evidence to state that the issue of human rights is relatively new and contemporary within the management field since 91% of the articles on the subject have been published since the 2000's. Interestingly, the number of publications observed in the last period (i.e. 2010 - 2017) exceeded by 30 the number of articles published in the previous decade. That is, in the first five years of the 2000s, only 46 articles were published, 78 less than in 2010s first five years, revealing a significant increase in publications' pace.
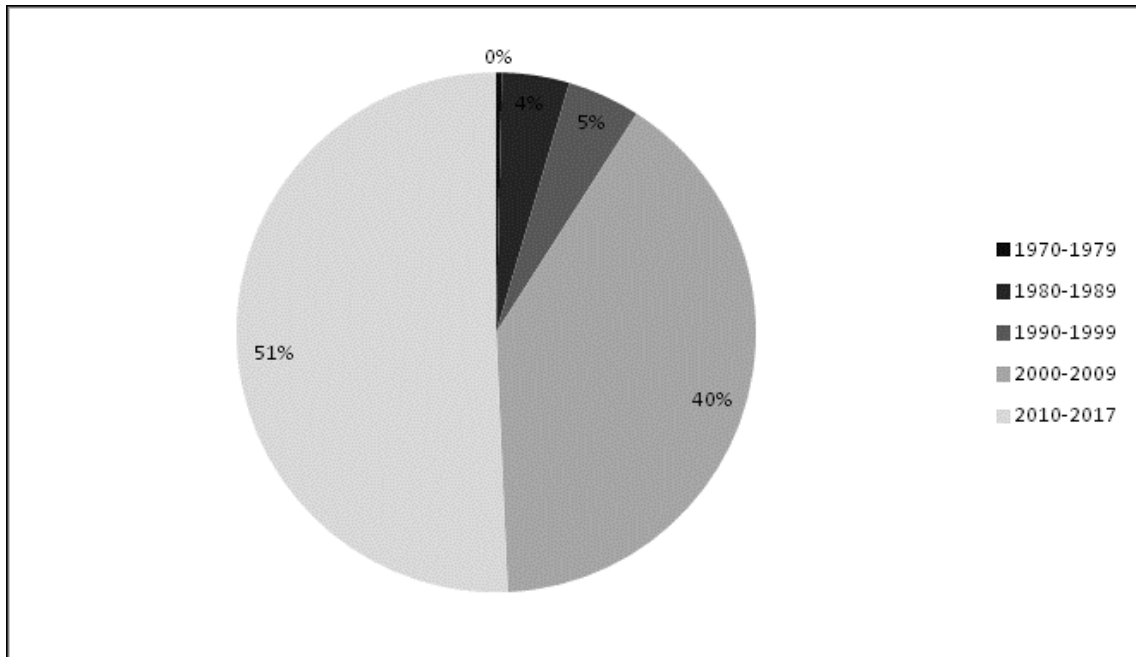
Figure 3 – Publications distribution per decade

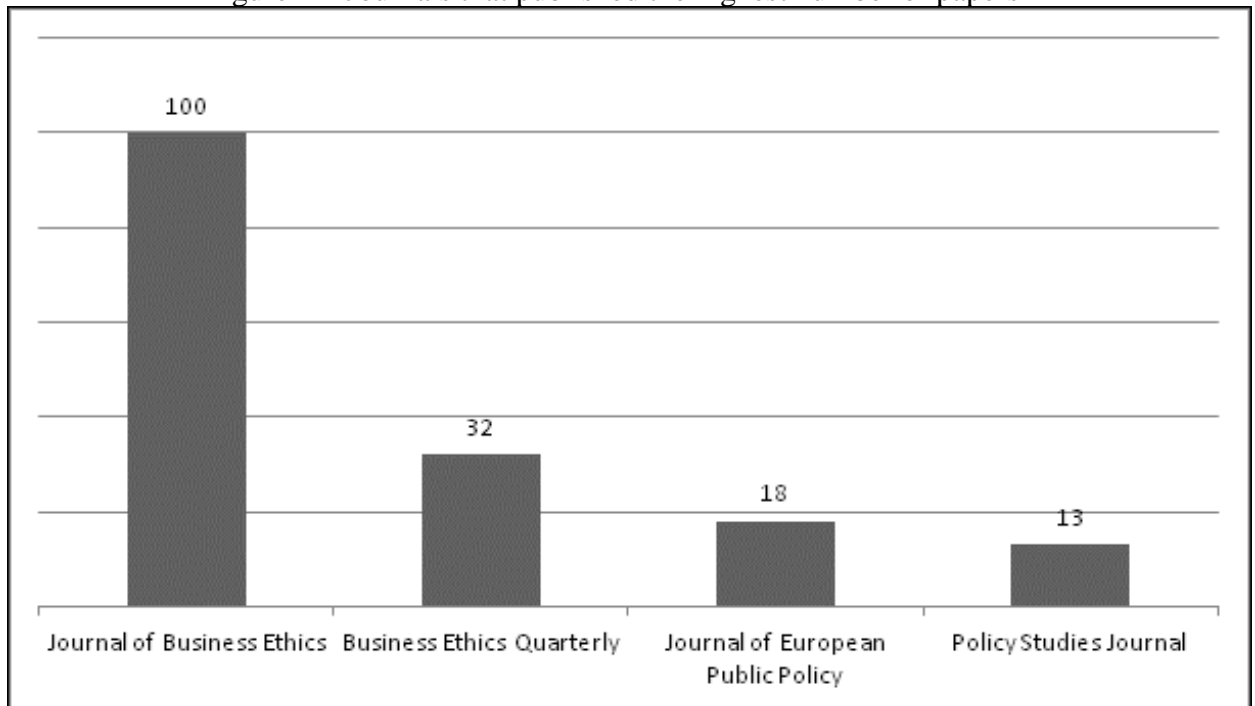**Source**: Elaborated by the authors with Web of Knowledge data, 2017.

## A conversation on impact: influential articles and journals

Among the 286 scientific articles of the selected sample, a significant portion was published in four journals: (i) *Journal of Business Ethics*, with a 1,837 JCR; (ii) *Business Ethics Quarterly*, with a 1,735 JCR; (iii) *Journal of European Public Policy*, with a 1,964 JCR; and (iv) *Policy Studies Journal*, with a 1,765 JCR. In total, these four journals published 163 papers, or almost 57% of the sample, indicating a strong concentration. We opted for a more detailed analysis of those journals that have published more than 10 articles, as shown in Figure 4.

The *Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)*, published since 1982 by Springer, is the outlet that published the highest number of articles on the subject, totaling 100. As the name suggests, it specializes in topics related to ethics in business. The editorial of the journal encourages the submission of papers to bring new discourses and approaches to the area of business ethics and to increase the dialogue between the different interest groups in the area (JBE, 2015). By its turn, the *Business Ethics Quarterly (BEQ)* has been published since 1991 and features 32 articles in the sample investigated. It is defined as a multidisciplinary journal focused on discussing business ethics, recognizing contributions of different fields of knowledge (BEQ, 2015). The third periodic with the highest number of articles in the sample, with eighteen published articles, is the *Journal of European Public Policy (JEPP)*, which is published since 1994. The journal, as the name suggests, focuses on discussions of public policies in the European context, and is dedicated to publishing analytical, theoretical, and methodological articles (JEPP, 2015).

Two special issues published by JEPP draw attention. The first was published in August 2006 with the theme "What kind of power? European foreign policy in perspective" and contains two articles present in the selected sample. The second special edition had the theme "The constitutionalization of the European Union", published in February 2007 and contained three articles in this sample.

Figure 4 – Journals that published the highest number of papers



**Source:** Elaborated by the authors with Web of Knowledge data, 2017.

Finally, the *Policy Studies Journal (PSJ)* has thirteen articles among the selected ones. It was created in 1972, and its editorial defines itself as a vehicle for circulation of theoretical research and empirically grounded in the public policy field. In the selected sample, six papers were published in a special edition on human rights in September 1986. This helps explain the first boom in the number of publications on this subject, as mentioned in the previous section.

Interestingly, this special edition of the PSJ is due to a symposium on Comparative Human Rights Policies, funded by the Human Rights and Governance program of the Ford Foundation. The issue focuses on the comparative analysis of the different strategies of measurement and evaluation of policies on human rights of Nation-States (Cingranelli, 1986). Therefore, it shows that the human rights topic were still incipient in the management field since his concern exclusively fell on the role of States in promoting human rights. This approach has changed in the last decade, as discussed below. In addition, the theme was entering management research agenda through Ford Foundation.

Such summarizing of the most influential journals and publications on this subject shows that a number of papers on human rights in business is not proportionately large in any of the analyzed journals. In other words, the proportion of published articles on this topic is relatively small compared to the total number of articles published by the journal, both when considering a given year in the journal or when analyzing its publication throughout the journal's history.

Under this context, it is possible to highlight the importance of special editions for introduction and dissemination of human rights topic within management field. Although it is not the aim of this study to prove a correlation between special editions and the number of articles published on such theme, we consider that there is already evidence of its importance, since the number of publications on human rights increases after the special edition. There were at least three special editions (two on JEPP and the PSJ) and, except for the first call of PSJ in 1986, they all raised the level of the number of publications later.

After presenting the most influential journals that have published on the subject, we analyze the evolution of the human rights topic in the management field through the most cited articles. Those papers develop the theme of human rights and are important in the dissemination of the discussion on human rights since they have a high number of citations. Figure 5 at the end of this section shows the twelve papers with more than seventy citations, and that are, therefore, the most cited ones.

While JBE published the highest number of articles on the subject, it is *California Management Review* (CMR) that holds the most influential papers, having published three of the most cited ones, including the most influential paper (Spar and La Mure, 2003; Argenti, 2004; Drayton, 2002). All three papers focus case studies, discussing the implications of human rights violations (Drayton, 2002) or the interaction of among activists and corporations (Spar and La Mure, 2003; Argenti, 2004). This is a fascinating finding, as CMR is an outlet that focus on the link between theory and business practice, this might be an evidence that regardless the fact that human rights topics entered the management agenda recently, it is already influencing the management practice.

BEQ and JBE have both published two papers each and alongside the three papers published at CMR, totaling seven, they concentrate the more than 50% of the most influential papers. Additionally, BEQ and JBE have consistently published on the subject. This may be an indication that there is a concentration of human rights topic in a particular place (Spink 2000; Schatzki, 2005) within management field. In this paper, we call "place" the organizational space in which disputes over meanings of social relations are negotiated and built (Spink, 2000; Schatzki, 2005). Thus, in the case analyzed aimed at understanding what means an approach on human rights within management, a place can be understood as the path of such topic on the research agenda of this particular discipline. For example, if a journal designed for research on logistics publishes articles discussing human rights, this shows that this issue has some relevance to the area. Consequently, the approach, interpretation and importance of human rights are likely to be different from those developed by a journal of the corporate social responsibility area and/or ethics. Hence, one can reflect the main areas evoked when developing this subject, which interpretations of human rights they built, which approach the authors have adopted, and especially what is the focus of journals that are giving space to such topic.

Therefore, when examining the characteristics of journals that have published on human rights and the objectives developed by the most cited articles, there are enough elements for understanding the story of human rights in management studies, thus offering an interpretation of the academic context of its emergence. It is possible to assume that these papers' citations index sets a multiplying mechanism of the general themes addressed on them which identifies some recurring themes that constitute the place of human rights within the management field. Although all articles relate to the theme of human rights, this term does not figure in any of them as one of the keywords, which could suggest that human rights do not constitute a specific area, but an idea built from elsewhere.

However, with different significance in each article, were identified four themes regarding human rights: (i) interaction between NGOs, corporations and society; (ii) corporate citizenship; (iii) corporate social responsibility and; (iv) corporate accountability. This indicates that the human rights are usually a bridge connecting fields traditionally researched in management. Corroborating, analysis, as the one developed at the beginning of this section, regarding journal's focus and priorities reveals that corporate social responsibility and the relationship of corporations to society are recurrent approaches. Therefore, it is not clear that human rights topic is already consolidated as a specific area within management, although it offers a narrative to explore the relationship between business and society.

**Conclusion**

We have analyzed the human rights path within management studies, by using a bibliometric approach, which examined product and impact indicators. We conclude that human rights are already a management topic and that it arrived at the field through the place of ethics. The interest on the theme has recently grown as a background to understand the relation between businesses and society. It is possible to affirm that there was a significant increase in the number of publications adopting a human rights framework over the past decade, indicating that the subject has been consolidated within this field. It is clear that the production peaked in 2009. The bibliometric data analyzed do not offer conditions to explore the social context that led to such phenomenon, but it is reasonable to assume that the 2008 economic crisis influenced the resumption of discussions that underlie ethical issues in management.

Two periods observed in this historical series take substantial relevance to what is proposed here: firstly, the emergence and maintenance of investigations over human rights in management, observed between 1977 to 2000; secondly, its consolidation and intense rate of publications, revealed from 2001 to 2017. While in the first period, the low rate of publications addressing this issue is clear – except for the year 1986, due to a special edition – almost every year at least one article has been published. Thus, during this period, the attention to human rights has not disappeared. In contrast, during the second period, it is possible to see a remarkable increase in the volume of publications, with significant peaks such as the one in 2009 and 2012.

It is also observable that the discussion over human rights within management area is modest compared to other fields such as law. There is at least one reason for that: human rights were born within justice and law areas, and it has flourished under this perspective. However, this research has shown an increased interest of management over human rights. Since 2001, there has been evidence of a specific place for human rights in management studies. It left aside such legalistic perspective and became an approach to understanding the relationship between organizations and society, placing respect for human rights as a matter of responsibility and duty of corporations. This shows the maturation of the topic within management, since it consolidates a specific research field, developing its own concepts and approaches.

Chart 1 – Most cited papers – with more than 70 citations

| | Title | Author (s) | Keywords | Journal | Citations | Human Rights within the paper | Topics discussed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The power of activism: assessing the impact of NGOs on global business | Spar & La Mure (2003) | social-responsibility; integrated strategy; market; politics; boycotts; conduct; codes (pointed out by the web of science) | California Management Review | 166 | The cases analyzed involved NGOs claiming attention of corporations and the systematic violations of human rights in the countries where they operate | Interaction between corporations and NGOs; action strategies activists NGOs; forms of corporate response to organized activism; |
| 2 | Corporate social responsibility: three key approaches | Windsor (2006) | stakeholder theory; business school; performance; ethics (pointed out by the web of science) | Journal of Management Studies | 136 | The article presents theoretical and conceptual reflection addressing the issue of corporate citizenship, sometimes tangential to the theme of human rights in normative terms | Corporate social responsibility; theory of ethical responsibility; theory of economic responsibility; theory of corporate citizenship; |
| 3 | Behind the mask: revealing the true face of corporate citizenship | Matten, Crane & Chapple (2003) | business and government; corporate; citizenship; corporate social responsibility; globalization; human rights; stakeholder theory | Journal of Business Ethics | 124 | Critique of the notion of corporate citizenship that goes by examining the notion of citizenship, also addressing human rights in normative terms | Corporate social responsibility; corporate philanthropy; corporate citizenship; |
| 4 | More than an industry: the forgotten power of tourism as a social force | Higgins-Desbiolles (2004) | neoliberalism; right to tourism; social impacts of tourism; social tourism | Tourism Management | 112 | The author revises various international conventions that established the right to tourism as a human right | Neoliberal Era; tourism industry; social tourism; non-Western perspectives on tourism; tourism as a social force; |
| 5 | The Private Regulation of Global Corporate Conduct Achievements and Limitations | Vogel (2010) | Regulation; global; civil; governance; nonstate | Business & Society | 103 | The article assesses the achievements and limitations of the private regulation of global corporate conduct that address human right policies and other related issues | Private regulation; global corporate conduct; relations between business and society; NGO's engagement in private regulation; |
| 6 | Business citizenship: from domestic to global level of analysis | Logsdon and Wood (2002) | corporate social performance; contracts theory (pointed out by the web of science) | Business Ethics Quarterly | 98 | When proposing theoretical and conceptual transitions involving the revised approaches, the authors point out human rights as | Global business citizenship; corporate citizenship; universality of human rights; |

| | | | | | a reference for establishing the duties of corporations | |
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| | ---------- | | | | | |
| 7 | Using best-worst scaling methodology to investigate consumer ethical beliefs across countries | Auger, Devinney & Louviere (2007) | social issues; best–worst experiments; cross-country study | Journal of Business Ethics | 79 | The article examines differences across six countries in the attitudes of consumers towards social and ethical issues that included general social factors such as human rights | Consumer's behavior; corporate social responsibility; consumer activism; ethical consumerism; cross-cultural consumer ethics; |
| 8 | Collaborating with activists: how Starbucks works with NGOs | Argenti (2004) | no keywords were pointed out in the journal or in the web science | California Management Review | 79 | The article discusses the strategies of activist organizations dedicated to human rights issues as well as the forms of interaction between them and corporations | Interaction between corporations and NGOs; action strategies activists NGOs; forms of corporate response to organized activism; collaboration and engagement between corporations and NGOs; |
| 9 | From Smoke and Mirrors to Walking the Talk: Decoupling in the Contemporary World | Bromley & Powell (2012) | corporate social-responsibility; loosely-coupled systems; symbolic management; human-rights; organizational responses; institutional logics; affirmative-action; normal accident; perspective; myth (pointed out by the web of science) | Academy of Management Annals | 77 | In attention to the rising of rationalizing trends in society and related pressures on organizations to align their policies and practices, authors retrieves the debate on decoupling processes. Human rights is one of many issues leading to pressures to organizations clarify the opaque connections between its means and ends. | Rationalization; managerial sciences; decoupling; organizational complexity; human rights; environmental issues; |
| 10 | The impact of supply chain structure on the use of supplier socially responsible practices | Awaysheh & Klassen (2010) | Corporate social responsibility; Supply chain management; Operations management; Fair trade; Canada | International Journal of Operations & Production Management | 72 | The article investigate the integration of social issues in the management supply chain. Human rights is one of the social issues increasingly relevant to the definition of supply chain management practices. | Corporate social-responsibility; supply chain management; social issues; operations management perspective; labor practices; norms of conduct; social audits; |

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| 11 | Private political authority and public responsibility: transnational politics, transnational firms and human rights | Kobrin (2009) | international-business; global governance; legitimacy; law; corporations; deliberation; organization; norms (pointed out by the web of science) | Business Ethics Quarterly | 72 | By acknowledging that corporations have become actors with significant political power and authority, the author argues that it should derive the assumption of responsibility and equivalent obligations, especially direct obligations of complicity in human rights violations | Theory of systems; emerging transnational order; Westphalian treaty; Private corporations and political authority; corporations and accountability; |
| 12 | The citizen sector: Becoming as entrepreneurial and competitive as business | Drayton (2002) | no keywords were pointed out in the journal or in the web science | California Management Review | 70 | The article describes the historical emergence and the recent changes ocurring in what the authors calls the "citizen sector", the individual and collective social entrepreneurs working in the interface between social and business halves of society. Human rights organizations is pointed as one of the leaders in bringing competitivity and good work conditions to the citizen sector. | Third-sector; social entrepreunership; human rights; work relations; competitivity; historical analysis; business and society; |

**Source:** Elaborated by the authors with Web of Knowledge data, 2017.

Regarding future research agenda, this bibliometric analysis sets the ground for future discussions of human rights perspective adopted concepts. Firstly, a citation network analysis (i.e. who cites whom) would provide a better understanding of the scientific development of human rights in management studies, especially to seek for how and when it has come from law studies. Additionally, it would be important to identify when the human rights subject is no longer associated with a duty only for nations and the relationship between corporations and society emerge. Investigating historical explanations for the human rights emergence is necessary, as it would provide the social contexts that enabled such development. Thus, it is clear that a research agenda on human rights should emphasize the relationship between corporations and its impacts on society, even though the concept of human rights can be controversial, it offers an opportunity to examine the corporate impact on human kind. Finally, it would be interesting to expand this analysis towards other databases (Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, Palacios-Marués, 2016). Examples would be to expand the sample using journals that are not listed on the WoS database or to analyze conference proceedings to see how the topic is dealt in meetings that usually have a higher acceptance rate.

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