

IFSAM 2023 Award

IFSAM Award for Exceptional Service to the Management Field Worldwide

Winner: Prof. Pervez Ghauri

Interviewed by Ying Ying Zangh Zang

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Congratulations, Professor Pervez Ghauri, and thank you for joining us today. Can you share with us your journey in this field of management scholarship? What inspired you to pursue this path?

Thank you very much, YingYing. This is a real honor to have received this award.

I am really very, very proud and humble, and especially when now I have been working for more than over 30 years, and it feels very good to be recognized. So, how did I start this? In fact, to start with, I did not want to be an academic, so, but I wanted to go to World Bank or United Nations and these type of places, and somebody told me, oh, then you must do a PhD because you must have highest qualifications. So, I started doing my PhD in Uppsala University in Sweden, and there in the second or third year, from second or third year, we start teaching, so we teach.

So, the more I started teaching, the more I liked it. So, and I was very well appreciated by the students, so then sort of I got used to it, and very, I liked it very much, and most of all, what I liked was that we can do research in whatever field we like. There is nobody telling us, you have to do right about this, or you have to do that.

So, the freedom of thought or freedom of writing and freedom of scholarship was the biggest attraction. That's why I stayed in academics.

It seems many interesting things have happened. What were some of the key milestones or turning points in your career, you think that lead to your this recognition by exam?

Yeah, I think the turning point, in fact, was when I moved out of Uppsala, because normally in Uppsala, people do PhD there, and normally they stay there. So, most of my colleagues are still in Uppsala, those who did PhD together with me, but I was very early on, moved on to Oslo Business School, and I was asked to come and help them to start an MBA programme. And I think that was very, very turning point, because then I started to take my own initiative and work with a lot of other international colleagues.

We went to America a couple of times to understand the MBA programmes, and so on. And then we started the very first English speaking MBA programme in Nordic countries in Oslo Business School, which was very popular. We were hoping that we will get 25, 30 students, but right from first year, we had 80 students.

So, it was really very encouraging. So, I think that was the turning point, and then I got more and more interested in academic profession.

If you have to see some critical successful factors that contribute to exceptional service and achievement in value review, what would you see?

Yeah, then I think another critical factor was that I founded or started the International Business Review, the journal.

And during my stay in Uppsala and Oslo, often in conferences, it was discussed that all the journals are American, and they are not very friendly with European papers, and we do not have any outlet for Europeans in international business. So, that kept on coming back and back, and a couple of efforts were made also, one from Uppsala, but they did not succeed, because people are not getting manuscripts. So, then I started, I said, okay, why not? There is a gap, there is something which is needed.

So, I started the journal, and I think that was really a success factor, because that gave me lots of profile, and luckily, it became very successful. And now it is among the three top journals in our field. So, I think that was very, very critical for my career, and people got to know me well.

All those success, you know, any of those challenges, or biggest challenges that you have ever encountered during this journey of management scholarship? How did you overcome this challenge, or do you have any kind of strategy approach that you find most effective in those cases?

I think the most effective is, of course, there are always challenges that you have to, you are, you have certain ideas in your head, and you want to forward on that path, but it's not always you can.

So, there are lots of other things. And because when I was director of MBA programme, and became associate dean in Oslo, then I was becoming more and more administrator type of person. And that I didn't like, and I wanted to become a professor.

And then the Oslo Business School at that time did not have the authority to give professorships, because it has to be done by the government at that time. So, then I started looking, and then I struggled a bit, but finally I got professorship in the that I think was a very big jump for me. And then I had to totally new environment, totally new colleagues, totally new people.

So, it took me some time to get adjusted, and pursue what I wanted to pursue. And after that, I have been very, very well. I have been member of AIB, and AMA, and these two associations, IMP, right from start, from the time I was PhD student.

And I kept on with that. And that's why these associations rewarded me. So, I was vice president for AIB for three years, and I was, I am fellow now, also for IBA and AIB.

So, I think persistence helps.

So, reflecting on your career, what are some of the most significant lessons you say you have learned?

Yeah, I think the lesson I have learned is that, first of all, it sounds very simple, but first of all, that you have to be very nice with everybody.

No, you cannot keep grudges, and you cannot be angry, and you cannot. So, I think that has been a big lesson for me, that you have to be always nice to people. And I am particularly very nice to junior colleagues, and to my PhD students.

I have my PhD students from my early years, 2000 and so on, with the Manchester Business School, my first five PhD students, and I still have very good contact with them, and we still publish, and they are all, some of them are even professors. So, I think that's the main thing, that one should nurture relationships. One, I have, as I said, right from the start, working with Peter Buckley, then Pamela Cowleskill, and some other good names, I came in contact with my early years, and I kept on contact with them.

So, I think that's the thing, that be nice and nurture your relationships with people.

So, is this kind of advice you can offer to other men and scholars, particularly those who are just starting their career, or some more advice you can give emerging scholars to make more meaningful impact also?

Yeah, I think that the one thing is, this is one of the things, another thing is being persistent, because the problem with young scholars is that they send a paper to a journal, and it gets rejected, and they are really disheartened, and then they don't even try anymore, but we all get rejection, I still get rejections. So, that's the thing, that you have to be persistent, you have to understand, you have to look into the comments people give you, and try to mend yourself for your paper, your publication, or whatever.

And so, you have to really be very persistent, and don't get disheartened by small rejections or setbacks.

How do you evaluate the impact of your contribution to the management field overall, broader community, even beyond academia?

Yeah, I think the one good thing I have been doing is that adjusting myself always, always upgrading myself. I started as a marketing assistant professor, and then I got more and more into international marketing, and then more and more into international business, because of also the colleagues I was working with, like Peter Buckley and Pamela Kowalski. So, so you have always progressed in your, in your career, and then more and more already in, in 2000 or 2005, we had a book, which although I was not the editor, but I was contributor, and I contributed several chapters in that, was about the critical perspective on international business.

So that means already then we started looking at what is business doing, what are the externalities multinationals are creating when they go to emerging markets, and, and to other countries, do, do they benefit the society, or do they not benefit the society, and so on. So that, those ideas I have had for a long time, and then now, luckily, they fall into the same line as SDG, and ESG, and all these things again. So I have had a couple of very big projects, one, one with the role of multinationals in poverty alleviation, and which I had together with Oxford University and, and Finland from the La Peralta University, and that we then we did three, four year project in Ghana, in India, in Brazil.

And after that, we continued on that, and then Oxford, Xiaolong Fu, my colleague from Oxford, and I, we had another project where we wanted to see how can we develop a business model where poorer people, or people from poorer communities, entrepreneurs, etc, can do business, and gain confidence. And there we did lots of studies, we developed an app, which we launched, but only for poor people, no commission, no advertisements, no fee, and they could use it. And so, so that had been very, very good.

And we have published a number of papers out of that. And then these days, just currently, I have having a project with Brazil and Colombia, where we have studied the role of multinationals in upgrading or bringing marginalized communities into normal economic activities. How can multinationals go to these emerging markets and involve or incorporate people from poorer segments to into their into their economic activities, because multinationals are often blamed that they only go to emerging markets and serve only the 10% elite population.

And they don't bother about the poorer communities. And that's what we are studying now. And soon there will be some results.

It's great to hear all the great things that you are doing. Thank you so much. Lastly, what suggestions do you have for measuring or enhancing this influence of many scholars in the future? Maybe the line of things that you're doing?

Yeah, I think one big, like in AIB, we have a panel on disruptive knowledge.

So one of the observation which I and some number of colleagues, we have written a paper in GIPS, where we point out is that our field is sort of stagnating. There is no new thinking coming, there is no theories coming, there is no revolutionary or disruptive research coming. That means what I'm trying to say is, we are always doing confirmatory research, meaning that we build hypotheses from whatever has already been done.

And then we try to confirm the hypothesis by hook or by crook. So if something by that, I mean that if some question or so is not confirming our hypothesis, we throw away that question so that we can show that our hypothesis is confirmed. So we should get away a little bit from that and do more exploratory research, which is phenomena-based and not database.

So phenomena-based research that take us to new fields. Another thing is, which I feel our field needs to do is to be more interdisciplinary. We use our own theories, our own theory all the time, keep on testing, keep on confirming, but there are lots of other theories, especially the issues we have just talked about, about the impact on society, etc.

So we can borrow from many other fields, for example, development studies. Development studies have lots of study, lots of research on how companies or governments or policy makers can influence the development of different countries, but not only development of countries, but human development.

How can we incorporate those types of theories? So we need to be more interdisciplinary.

That's what I mean.

It's great to listen to you and learn all those from you. And I believe that we will do much better in the future.

Thank you very much.