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Rethinking Systematic Literature Reviews: A Critical and Evolving Perspective on the SPAR-4-SLR Protocol

Repenser les revues systématiques de la littérature : une perspective critique et évolutive du protocole SPAR-4-SLR

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Abstract

Systematic literature reviews have become a key methodological standard in contemporary management research. Yet, in light of the growing diversity of research topics, methodological approaches and contextual realities, the question arises: should the systematic review protocol be reconsidered? This article provides a critical and constructive analysis of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews), which has gained significant traction in recent years. Through an in-depth examination of its structure, applications and limitations, we advocate for its evolution into an enriched, modular and reflexive framework: the **SPAR+**. Our contribution combines a structured typology of review forms, an analysis of existing analytical grids, and a conceptual proposal integrating epistemological positioning, contextual sensitivity, and the opportunities brought by artificial intelligence. This article aims to support scholars, doctoral candidates and journal editors in fostering transparency, rigor, and critical awareness in systematic literature reviews.

Keywords: systematic literature review, SPAR-4-SLR protocol, SPAR+, methodological critique, review typology, artificial intelligence, epistemology.

Résumé

Les revues systématiques de la littérature se sont imposées comme un standard méthodologique essentiel dans la recherche en sciences de gestion contemporaine. Cependant, face à la diversité croissante des thématiques de recherche, des approches méthodologiques et des contextes d'étude, une question s'impose : le protocole de revue systématique doit-il être repensé ? Cet article propose une analyse critique et constructive du protocole **SPAR-4-SLR** (*Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews*), qui a connu un essor considérable au cours des dernières années. À travers un examen approfondi de sa structure, de ses applications et de ses limites, nous plaidons pour son évolution vers un cadre enrichi, modulaire et réflexif : le **SPAR+**.

Notre contribution combine une typologie structurée des formes de revues, une analyse des grilles analytiques existantes et une proposition conceptuelle intégrant le positionnement épistémologique, la sensibilité contextuelle et les opportunités offertes par l'intelligence artificielle.
Cet article vise à accompagner les chercheurs, doctorants et éditeurs de revues dans la promotion de la transparence, de la rigueur et de la réflexivité critique au sein des revues systématiques de la littérature.

Mots-clés : revue systématique de la littérature, protocole SPAR-4-SLR, SPAR+, critique méthodologique, typologie des revues, intelligence artificielle, épistémologie.

Introduction

Over the last decade, systematic literature reviews have experienced a remarkable boom in the management sciences. This renewed interest is due in particular to the growing demands of high-ranking academic journals (ranked Q1/Q2 in Scopus, WoS or CABS), which favour contributions based on a rigorous, structured and reproducible review of the state of the art. In this context, the literature review is no longer confined to a simple introduction, but becomes a scientific process in its own right, underpinning the quality and legitimacy of research work.

However, despite this increased methodological recognition, the landscape of literature reviews remains fragmented and often ambiguous. The proliferation of different types of review - narrative, integrative, systematic, bibliometric, conceptual or meta-analytical - is accompanied by persistent confusion as to their nature, aims, respective methods and associated analytical frameworks. This situation is made all the more problematic by the fact that many publications fail to explain either the underlying methodological rationale or the tools used to guide the analysis and ensure the transparency of the process.

Faced with this diversity, several analytical grids (ADO, TCCM, TCM, 5W1H) and reporting protocols such as PRISMA have been proposed to provide researchers with tools. However, these systems, useful as they are, focus on specific phases of the review without offering an integrated framework to guide the entire process in a coherent and justified manner. The SPAR-4-SLR protocol, recently developed by Paul et al (2021), fits into this methodological void. It is distinguished by its ambition to structure all the stages of a systematic review while justifying each decision taken, from the definition of the field to the reporting of the results.

The present article is part of this process of methodological development. Its aim is, firstly, to clarify the various forms of literature review used in the management sciences, by placing them in a coherent and operational typology; and secondly, to analyse the SPAR-4-SLR protocol critically, highlighting its contributions, limitations and potential for development. Particular attention will be paid to its ability to integrate existing analytical tools and to respond to the contemporary challenges of complexity, transdisciplinarity and the need for scientific rigour.

To do this, we adopt an in-depth documentary approach, combining a critical analysis of recent methodological literature with a cross-reading of the analytical frameworks used in the main Q1/Q2 journals in management, marketing, finance and information systems. The article is divided into four sections: a typology of existing forms of review; a presentation of the main analytical tools; a critical analysis of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol; and finally, a discussion of the prospects for improving or extending this protocol.

1. Forms of management science literature reviews

Literature reviews are a fundamental exercise in management science, serving to consolidate the state of knowledge, identify gaps in existing research and suggest avenues for theoretical or empirical development. Depending on the objective, the maturity of the field and the methodological constraints, several forms of review can be used, each with its own specific features, advantages and limitations. An in-depth analysis of the methodological literature (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019; Paul & Criado, 2020; Donthu et al., 2021) identifies the following forms.

Narrative reviews, also known as exploratory or traditional reviews, are characterised by their flexibility and the absence of a formalised protocol. It provides a general overview of a field of research, tracing the main concepts, debates and historical developments. This type of review is often used in the preliminary phase of a research project, or in fields that have been little explored. However, the lack of explicit inclusion criteria and the subjectivity of the treatment limit the scientific validity of its results (Snyder, 2019). It is used, for example, by Pittaway and Cope (2007) in their review of entrepreneurial learning, which highlights the conceptual tensions in the field without following a rigorous protocol.

The **thematic review**, on the other hand, organises publications around themes, categories or trends identified in the literature. It is generally based on inductive reading (emergence of themes from the texts) or deductive reading (prior categorisation) and aims to reveal the main trends in the field studied. It is often used in reviews of complex or multidimensional subjects. For example, Kraus et al (2020) structure their review of circular innovation around six major themes, making it easier to understand the field and identify the major contributions.

The **integrative review**, as defined by Torraco (2005, 2016), aims to bring together and synthesise empirical and theoretical contributions with a view to constructing a coherent synthesis leading to a proposed conceptual model or interpretative framework. It requires a rigorous analytical approach and a cross-disciplinary reading of the contributions. This format is particularly suited to theoretical publications. Schilke et al (2018) offer an illuminating example in their review on dynamic capabilities, where they identify the logics underlying the different conceptual uses of this notion.

Systematic reviews, inspired by evidence-based medicine, are based on a structured, transparent and reproducible protocol. It is distinguished by the explicit description of the research stages, the inclusion/exclusion criteria, and the methodical selection of sources. Very popular in classified journals, it aims to offer an exhaustive and rigorous view of a corpus, while

limiting the researcher's biases. The introduction of this method into management is often attributed to Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003), who demonstrated its relevance in the social sciences.

Bibliometric reviews use quantitative techniques to map scientific production in a given field. It is based on the analysis of metadata (titles, keywords, authors, co-citations, etc.) extracted from databases such as Scopus or Web of Science, and uses tools such as VOSviewer or Biblioshiny. This type of review makes it possible to visualise trends, networks of influence and temporal dynamics. Donthu et al (2021) have proposed a detailed guide, which has now been widely adopted by management researchers.

Meta-analysis is another form of systematic review, but with a statistical focus. It aggregates the results of comparable quantitative studies to estimate an overall effect (effect size) using multivariate analysis techniques. This format requires standardised, well-documented data, and follows strict protocols (e.g. PRISMA, MOOSE). It is common in marketing or organisational behaviour, as illustrated by the meta-analysis by Grewal et al. (2018) on the impact of digital marketing on customer performance.

Finally, the **hybrid review** combines several methodological approaches, for example a bibliometric analysis followed by a thematic or conceptual reading. This format is becoming increasingly widespread in interdisciplinary or complex fields, as it allows quantitative rigour to be reconciled with qualitative depth. Kraus et al (2022) offer a good example of this hybridisation in their study of sustainable entrepreneurship, by cross-referencing the results of a bibliometric mapping with an in-depth thematic analysis.

Thus, each form of review presents a specific combination of scientific objectives, methodological devices and expected deliverables. While the narrative review offers a flexible, exploratory entry into a field, the systematic review meets the growing demand for rigour and transparency in scientific publications. Other formats, such as the integrative review or the hybrid review, aim to produce syntheses with high conceptual added value, by combining a variety of approaches. As for bibliometric and meta-analytical reviews, they use increasingly sophisticated quantitative tools, adapted to the density of contemporary corpora.

To provide a clear and comparative overview of these forms of review, the table below provides a structured summary of the main characteristics of each format. The table puts into perspective the objectives pursued, the methods used, the types of data mobilised, a few emblematic examples, as well as the main limitations inherent in each approach. It is a valuable decision-

making aid for researchers wishing to select the journal format most consistent with their theoretical, empirical or methodological ambitions.

Table 1: Comparative table of literature reviews: methodological and practical benchmarks

Type of magazine	Main objective	Methodology	Type of data	Examples	Limits
Narrative	Exploring a field without a formalised protocol	Flexible, discursive reading	Empirical and theoretical articles	Pittaway & Cope (2007)	Weak rigour, selection bias
Themes	Structuring the field by axes or categories	Inductive or deductive grouping	Targeted corpus of documents	Kraus et al (2020)	Subjectivity in coding
Integrative	Building a conceptual synthesis	Critical analysis	Various articles (qualitative, theoretical)	Schilke et al (2018)	Complexity of implementation
Systematics	Offer a rigorous and exhaustive summary	Structured protocol (PRISMA, SPAR, etc.)	Corpus selected according to criteria	Tranfield et al (2003)	Time, need for methodological skills
Bibliometric	Mapping a field scientifically	Quantitative analysis (VOSviewer, etc.)	Bibliographic metadata	Donthu et al (2021)	Low conceptual depth
Meta-analysis	Calculating an overall statistical effect	Quantitative aggregation	Standardised figures	Grewal et al (2018)	Consistent data required
Hybrid	Combining two approaches to enrich the review	Mixed: quali + quanti	Corpus + bibliometric data	Kraus et al (2022)	Complexity, risk of inconsistency

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2. Analysis grids used in literature reviews

In systematic management science journals, the rigorous exploitation of the body of literature cannot be limited to a simple accumulation of articles. It requires the adoption of conceptual and methodological analytical frameworks capable of organising knowledge, structuring critical reading and bringing out robust scientific contributions. Several analytical frameworks have become established in the literature as reference points for conducting a structured and interpretative reading of corpora. Among the most widely used are the **ADO**, **TCM**, **TCCM** and **5W1H** models, plus the **PRISMA** protocol, recognised for its rigour in terms of methodological transparency. These tools are not mutually exclusive: they are more often than not complementary in the context of a well-structured systematic review.

The **ADO** (Antecedents - Decisions - Outcomes) model, proposed by Paul and Benito (2018), is based on a causal logic that lends itself particularly well to explanatory reviews. By

distinguishing between the antecedents of a phenomenon, the decisions or mechanisms studied, and the outcomes observed, it can be used to map the key relationships in the literature. Its value lies in its ability to reconstruct typical causal chains in research into strategy, innovation or organisational behaviour. However, its structural simplicity can sometimes restrict interpretative depth if it is not accompanied by a thorough theoretical discussion.

The **TCM** (Theories - Contexts - Methods) model, developed by Paul et al (2017), adds a meta-analytical dimension to this causal reading. It enables each article to be positioned along three axes: the theories used, the empirical contexts studied (countries, sectors, levels of analysis) and the methods used. This approach provides a panoramic analysis of research trends, which is useful for identifying imbalances (e.g. geographical or theoretical concentration) and suggesting future avenues. Its more elaborate version, the **TCCM** model (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019), introduces a fourth dimension: constructs, i.e. the central concepts or variables investigated in the literature. This framework has become a reference for conceptual reviews wishing to lead to structured research agendas. In particular, it can be used to identify combinations of theories, concepts and contexts that have not yet been fully explored, making it a powerful tool for identifying theoretical gaps and opportunities.

In parallel, the **5W1H** framework, inspired by investigative journalism and adapted to research by Lim (2020), offers an interrogative and cross-disciplinary analysis grid. By asking the questions *What, Why, Where, When, Who and How*, it enables a flexible but rigorous critical reading of the literature, focusing on the temporal, geographical, methodological and conceptual orientations of a field. Its use is particularly relevant in exploratory or integrative reviews, where the aim is less to model than to understand the evolving structure of the field. Although it does not impose any systematic codification, this framework encourages heuristic reflection that is often rich for the final discussion.

These content analysis grids are supplemented by **PRISMA** (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*), which is not a conceptual analysis tool, but a protocol for transparency and methodological rigour. Derived from the biomedical literature (Moher et al., 2009), PRISMA documents the article selection process using a checklist of 27 items (title, objectives, criteria, search strategy, selection process, etc.) and a standardised flow diagram. Its growing adoption in management sciences reflects the increasing demands of journals for traceability of scientific protocol. However, PRISMA does not provide a grid for interpreting content: it is therefore usefully combined with one of the previous frameworks in a complete systematic review.

These grids have specific advantages but also limitations. ADO is particularly effective for causal reviews, but is less suited to conceptual syntheses. TCM and TCCM offer fine mapping, but can generate an analytical overload if the corpus is heterogeneous. 5W1H is flexible but sometimes too generalist if it is not structured by clear dimensions. As for PRISMA, its value lies in its documentary rigour, but it cannot be used on its own to interpret the literature.

From an integrated perspective, these tools can be used in a complementary way: PRISMA to justify the selection of the corpus; TCCM to structure the analysis of the articles; and 5W1H to enrich the critical discussion. This complementarity is all the more relevant when they are integrated into an overall protocol such as SPAR-4-SLR, where they occupy specific functions according to the stages of the process (Arranging and Assessing).

In order to better understand the specific features of these grids, the table below provides a comparative summary, highlighting their objectives, dimensions covered, preferred areas of application , advantages, limitations and recent examples of their use in classified journals.

Table 2 - Analysis grids and transparency tools for systematic reviews

Tool / Frame	Main objective	Dimensions covered	Areas of use	Benefits	Limits
ADO	Causal structuring	Background Decisions Results	Strategic management, technology adoption	Simplicity and clarity of causal links	Risk of oversimplification
TCM	Theoretical and methodological mapping	Theories Contexts Methods	Innovation, international business	Rigorous meta-analytical vision	Requires a homogeneous corpus
TCCM	Formulating avenues of research	Theories Concepts Contexts Methods	Marketing, strategy, HRM	Precise identification of gaps	Analytical complexity, risk of dispersion
5W1H	Critical and reflective reading	What, Why, Where, When, Who, How	Exploratory and integrative reviews	Flexibility, heuristic thinking	Lack of formal structure without codification

PRISMA	Protocol traceability and transparency	Selection, inclusion, exclusion, flow	Systematic reviews and meta-analyses	Standardisation, methodological rigour	Does not deal with conceptual content

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3. Critical analysis of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol

In a context where literature reviews occupy a strategic place in scientific production, the **SPAR-4-SLR** protocol **(Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews**), proposed by Paul et al (2021), represents an ambitious attempt to structure the review process in its entirety. This protocol is not limited to a sequence of technical steps; it aims to place each methodological decision within a rational, explicit and justifiable logic, inspired by the principles of *evidence-informed research*, while adapting to the specificities of management sciences.

3.1. A three-stage structure: Assembling, Arranging, Assessing

The SPAR-4-SLR protocol is based on three macro-stages, each subdivided into two operational sub-phases:

a) Assembling: identifying and collecting relevant documents

The aim of this first phase is to build up a relevant and traceable corpus. It is divided into :

- **Identification**: this involves formulating the research question, defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, choosing the databases (e.g. Scopus, WoS), keywords and types of document (scientific articles, book chapters, etc.). The emphasis is on completeness, precision and justification of the choices made.
- **Acquisition**: this sub-phase involves downloading, exporting, classifying and documenting the corpus using tools such as Mendeley, Zotero or EndNote. The aim is to ensure that the process can be replicated, thereby reinforcing scientific rigour.

b) Arranging: organising and refining the corpus

This second stage consists of intellectually and technically structuring the corpus in two stages:

- **Organisation**: the articles are classified according to one or more analytical grids (TCCM, ADO, TCM, etc.). Paul et al. recommend the use of at least one conceptual structure to systematise the analysis (e.g. the four pillars of TCCM).
- **Purification**: here, duplicates, off-topic articles and marginal contributions (working papers, editorial comments, etc.) are eliminated. The rigour of this stage is essential to

avoid interpretation bias. The authors stress the need to document the reasons for exclusion.

c) Assessing: analysing, interpreting, drafting

The final stage involves critical analysis of the content of the corpus and communication of the results:

- **Evaluation**: the analysis may be thematic, theoretical, bibliometric or hybrid. It should make it possible to identify the dominant trends, changes over time, areas of consensus, theoretical tensions and methodological or conceptual gaps.
- **Reporting**: the final report must reflect a transparent and rigorous approach. SPAR-4-SLR encourages the use of figures, tables and concept maps, and the explicit formulation of future avenues, structured according to the results of the assessment.

3.2. A cross-disciplinary and integrative methodology

One of the fundamental contributions of SPAR-4-SLR lies in its ability to traverse the different forms of journals (conceptual, bibliometric, systematic, integrative, etc.) without being restricted to them. Paul et al (2021) show, through several examples published in Q1 journals, how the protocol can be operationalised in a flexible manner.

For example, in a bibliometric review on international marketing, Kumar et al. (2020) use the SPAR structure to articulate the stages of selection, analysis of thematic clusters, and formulation of research perspectives. In a hybrid review on e-commerce, Dwivedi et al. (2021) also follow the SPAR steps to integrate both a bibliometric reading and an ADO grid.

This capacity for integration makes SPAR-4-SLR an adaptable framework, capable of absorbing complementary tools: PRISMA for transparency, TCCM for conceptual structuring, or VOSviewer for visualisations. In this way, it sets itself apart from previous overly compartmentalised approaches.

3.3. Comparison with PRISMA, SALSA and Torraco

Compared with **PRISMA**, the SPAR-4-SLR protocol stands out by extending the scope covered: whereas PRISMA concentrates on the traceability of the document selection process, SPAR also provides a framework for analysis, interpretation and editing. PRISMA is therefore a good complement, but not a substitute, as it does not offer conceptual structuring.

Faced with **SALSA** (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015), which is based on four general stages - *Search*, *Appraisal*, *Synthesis*, *Analysis* - SPAR-4-SLR stands out for its greater granularity and

better explicitness of the rationales at each stage. SALSA, although flexible, remains relatively vague about the selection and analysis criteria.

As for **Torraco** (2005, 2016), which proposes a model for integrative reviews with a conceptual aim, it does not offer a formalised collection framework or methodological justification. SPAR is intended here to be more prescriptive, while being applicable to a variety of objectives (conceptualisation, synthesis, mapping, etc.).

3.4. Identified limitations of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol

Despite its scope, the SPAR-4-SLR protocol has several important limitations, which Paul et al. acknowledge in part but which call for critical enrichment:

- Firstly, its **lack of explicit modularity**. The protocol assumes a linear application of the three stages, without always providing for alternative configurations depending on the type of journal. An integrative journal, for example, does not necessarily need a bibliometric tool, whereas an adaptive protocol could recommend or disable certain modules.
- Secondly, SPAR-4-SLR **does not fully integrate qualitative reviews** with a strong interpretative dimension (e.g. grounded theory literature review, meta-ethnography). There is no section dedicated to assisted qualitative coding (e.g. via NVivo), discursive analysis or the collaborative construction of meaning.
- In addition, it does **not offer guidance for quantitative meta-analyses**, which makes it less suitable for reviews aimed at statistically aggregating the results of empirical studies. The absence of specific recommendations on meta-analysis tools (such as RevMan or Comprehensive Meta-Analysis) may be a hindrance for researchers from quantitative disciplines.
- Finally, its **implementation requires an advanced level of skill**, both technical (software, corpus management) and theoretical (choice of analysis models). Although the protocol is intended to be universal, it may in fact reproduce inequalities in methodological access between experienced researchers and young researchers in training.

3.5. A basis for improvement, but a fruitful one

All in all, the SPAR-4-SLR protocol represents a major step forward in the standardisation of systematic reviews in management sciences. It represents a successful attempt to combine rigour, justification and adaptability, while remaining open to cross-disciplinary uses. However,

its relevance could be enhanced by an evolution towards a modular and enriched version, taking better account of the plurality of research designs (qualitative, meta-analytical, participatory). The following section will explore this perspective by proposing a critical extension of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol in order to adapt it to the epistemological and practical requirements of contemporary research.

4. Towards an enriched protocol: proposed critical extension of SPAR-4-SLR

The SPAR-4-SLR protocol undeniably made it possible to structure the literature review according to a rigorous sequential logic, while leaving room for adaptability. However, as discussed in the previous section, its application remains partially limited by the absence of advanced modularity, insufficient consideration of interpretative qualitative approaches, and weak articulation with the researcher's reflexive posture. Given these observations, this section proposes a critical extension of the protocol in the form of **SPAR+**, designed as an enriched, critical and epistemologically anchored version of the initial model.

4.1. Towards a modular protocol: SPAR+, SPAR-Q or SPAR-Hybrid

One of the first possible changes to the protocol is to make it **modular**, by adapting it according to the nature of the review being carried out. Three complementary variants could be proposed:

- **SPAR-Q** (Qualitative-focused): oriented towards interpretative or inductive journals, incorporating methods such as qualitative thematic analysis, grounded theory literature review or narrative meta-synthesis. This version would incorporate tools such as **NVivo**, open coding grids, and interpretation principles inspired by phenomenology or hermeneutics.
- **SPAR-Hybrid**: designed for journals combining bibliometric and analytical methods, it would incorporate specific modules for mapping (VOSviewer, Biblioshiny), guided thematic analysis (e.g. TCCM), and linking quantitative clusters and theoretical concepts.
- **SPAR+** (enriched generic version): proposed here as a global critical extension of the original model, it would introduce additional cross-cutting components: epistemological reflection, researcher's posture, contextual sensitivity, and contextualised recommendations.

4.2 Integrating explicit epistemological reflection

While SPAR-4-SLR adopts a pragmatic methodological approach, it only marginally addresses the epistemological dimension of the review process. The researcher's position - whether positivist, constructivist or critical - profoundly conditions his or her choices in terms of documentary selection, coding, analysis and interpretation.

A SPAR+ version could include a preliminary **"Epistemological Framing"** stage before the Assembling phase, in which the researcher would have to justify :

- The theoretical and ontological view of the phenomenon studied ;
- The way in which this view influences the construction of the corpus;
- The implications of this positioning for the interpretation of results.

This module would reinforce the journal's internal coherence and make it a genuine reflective exercise in knowledge production, rather than a mere technical protocol.

4.3. Add a "critical reflection" module on the researcher's posture

As an extension of epistemological reflection, it is essential to introduce into the protocol a phase dedicated to the researcher's critical reflexivity. This dimension is central to qualitative research and to journals that are sensitive to social, cultural or political issues.

A cross-cutting "Critical Reflection" module could be introduced after each SPAR+ macro-stage:

- After *Assembling*: to question the choice of bases and criteria, and any exclusion bias.
- After *Arranging*: to assess the way in which analytical frameworks structure, or limit, reading.
- After *Assessing*: to clarify the researcher's role in discussing the results and formulating perspectives.

This approach draws on work on reflexivity in the social sciences (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) and would enhance the critical intelligibility of the review process.

4.4. Adapting the protocol to non-English-speaking or emerging contexts

Another blind spot in the SPAR-4-SLR protocol concerns its geocultural dimension. The model assumes familiarity with international databases (Scopus, WoS) and the availability of English-language publications. This makes it difficult to apply in non-English-speaking contexts (Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America) where the relevant corpora are often published in local journals or in the national language.

A SPAR+ should include an inventory of alternative sources:

- Regional databases (AJOL, Cairn, Redalyc, Doaj...) ;
- Grey literature (institutional reports, theses, professional publications) ;
- Multiple languages (French, Spanish, Arabic, etc.) with a translation/annotation strategy.

This would strengthen the inclusive scope of the protocol, and would make it possible to better represent the research dynamics of the global South, which are all too often marginalised in traditional systematic reviews.

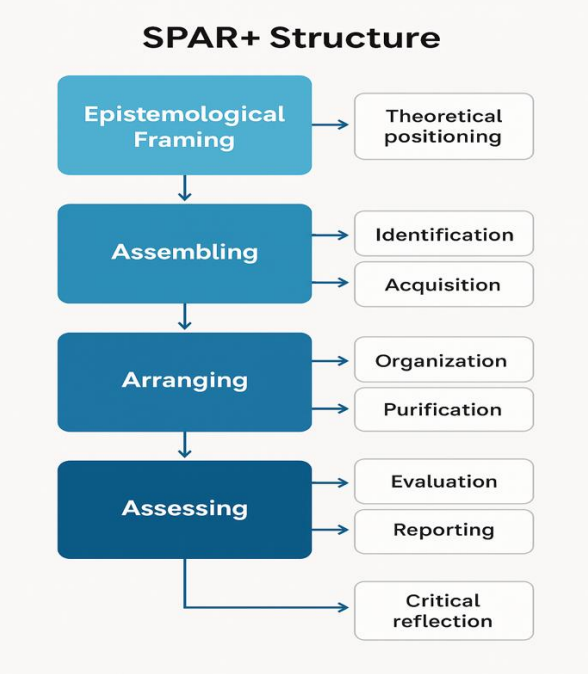
4.5. Towards an enriched SPAR matrix

All these proposals could give rise to an enriched SPAR matrix, constructed as a dynamic framework, adaptable according to the type of journal, the researcher's position and the constraints of the context. This matrix would include :

- Modular blocks depending on the type of review (qualitative, hybrid, meta-analytical, etc.);
- Reflective and epistemological options to be ticked according to the position adopted;
- Recommendations for digital tools associated with each phase.

This SPAR+ model would not replace the original protocol, but would be a critical and contextualised extension of it, more in tune with the diversity of practices in management sciences today.

Graph 1: Modular representation of the SPAR+ protocol: towards a structured, reflexive and contextual review



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The figure above presents a visual summary of the SPAR+ model, built around modules that can be adapted according to the type of review, the epistemological posture and the research context. This diagram illustrates the extended structure of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, here enriched in the form of a SPAR+ model, integrating specific modules according to the nature of the review (qualitative, hybrid, meta-analytic), the epistemological posture of the researcher, and the research context. Each macro-stage (Assembling, Arranging, Assessing) is augmented by cross-disciplinary blocks of critical reflection and methodological justification, to ensure internal consistency, rigorous traceability and adaptation to the diversity of scientific practices. To provide a concrete illustration of the extension of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol proposed in this article, the figure shows a visual summary of the SPAR+ model. This retains the original three-stage framework - *Assembling*, *Arranging* and *Assessing* - while adding reflexive and adaptive modules designed to enhance the methodological robustness and contextual sensitivity of the review.

Each stage is accompanied by:

- A framework for critical reflection, designed to question the researcher's stance, methodological choices and possible biases;

- Specific modular blocks, which can be activated according to the nature of the review being carried out (e.g. SPAR-Q for qualitative reviews, SPAR-Hybrid for mixed reviews, etc.);
- An explicit epistemological anchor, placed upstream of the process, which enables the choices made to be linked to the researcher's vision of knowledge.

The SPAR+ model is thus a dynamic matrix, capable of adapting to the requirements of a rigorous systematic review while offering the researcher critical freedom. It responds to the limitations identified in the initial protocol (absence of a qualitative component, lack of contextualisation, overly linear logic) and paves the way for a more inclusive, reflective and evolutionary approach to literature reviews in management sciences.

5. Discussion and implications

Proposing an enriched protocol such as SPAR+ is not just an exercise in methodological formalisation. It raises concrete and immediate issues for those involved in research, whether they are doctoral students, established researchers or editors of scientific journals. By broadening the possibilities of analysis, integrating epistemological dimensions and taking account of contextual specificities, the SPAR+ model aims to respond to the contemporary challenges of management science research, while providing a more inclusive and reflexive methodological framework.

5.1 Implications for doctoral students, researchers and publishers

For doctoral students, SPAR+ offers a structuring framework, both progressive and justified, for understanding the complexity of a literature review. It avoids the pitfall of simply accumulating descriptive articles, by introducing clear analytical logics (ADO, TCCM, bibliometrics, etc.), while leaving room for reflexivity. In training contexts where methodological skills are still being acquired, this protocol can play a fundamental formative role.

For established researchers, SPAR+ is a tool for formalising and justifying their scientific work, which is particularly useful for projects submitted to high-level international journals (Q1/Q2). The protocol's ability to combine transparency, rigour and methodological plurality makes it a lever for scientific legitimacy, particularly in fields that are still being structured or are highly interdisciplinary.

Finally, for journal editors and reviewers, the use of a protocol such as SPAR+ could facilitate the methodological evaluation of journal articles. By explaining the choices made at each stage

(bases, criteria, analysis tools, approach, etc.), SPAR+ can help to standardise editorial expectations, while respecting the diversity of disciplinary approaches and research traditions.

5.2. Recommendations for educational use of the SPAR(+) protocol

From an educational transmission perspective, the SPAR protocol and its extensions offer a number of advantages. It is recommended to :

- Present the protocol in the research methodology modules, not as a rigid standard, but as an evolving framework, to be adapted according to the objectives of the review;
- Train students to map the different forms of review (narrative, systematic, bibliometric, etc.), then to associate them with the relevant blocks of the protocol;
- Encourage the use of complementary tools (ADO grids, TCCM, PRISMA, VOSviewer) to enable a multifocal reading of the literature;
- Incorporate explicit epistemological reflection, even if only briefly, into the first literature review exercises, in order to develop a reflective attitude among future researchers.

The SPAR can thus become a teaching toolbox, suitable for both introductory and advanced courses, in research masters, doctorates or action research courses.

5.3. Limitations of the article and research prospects

Although this theoretical proposal for an enriched SPAR protocol is based on a rigorous critical analysis and a cross-reading of existing frameworks, it has several limitations that deserve to be recognised. On the one hand, this extension remains conceptual for the time being: it has not yet been empirically tested in various case studies (theses, published reviews, collaborative projects). On the other hand, some of the dimensions suggested (such as the integration of the researcher's posture or non-English-speaking corpora) would benefit from specific methodological developments, in the form of practical modules or more detailed guidelines.

There are several avenues for future research:

- Operationalise SPAR+ in the form of an interactive framework, or a digital tool to help build journals, incorporating configurable choices (type of journal, epistemological anchoring, linguistic basis, etc.);
- To study empirically the application of the protocol in different disciplinary or geographical contexts, in order to test its robustness, transferability and any necessary adjustments;

- Evaluate the effects of SPAR+ on the perceived quality of journals with publishers and reviewers of academic journals, through surveys or controlled experiments;
- To explore the uses of SPAR in French-speaking social sciences, in order to identify the obstacles, possible re-appropriations and local adaptations necessary for its dissemination.

In short, while SPAR-4-SLR was an essential first step towards the rational standardisation of systematic reviews, its development in the form of SPAR+ paves the way for a new generation of methodological protocols that are rigorous, reflective, inclusive and adaptable to changes in contemporary scientific practice.

Conclusion

Literature reviews occupy a central place in management sciences, both to consolidate knowledge and to formulate new frameworks for analysis. In this context, the **SPAR-4-SLR** protocol marked a significant advance by proposing a structured, justified and adaptable method for conducting systematic reviews. However, the analysis carried out in this article has shown that, despite its robustness, the initial model has significant limitations, particularly in terms of modularity, qualitative integration, researcher reflexivity and adaptability to emerging and non-English-speaking contexts.

In response to these limitations, we proposed a critical extension of the protocol, in the form of **SPAR+**, conceived as an enriched, modular and contextually sensitive methodological framework. This version incorporates several innovations: an explicit epistemological entry point, reflexive modules on the researcher's posture, the possibility of using qualitative and quantitative tools in a complementary way, and an openness to multilingual corpora and regional databases. The aim of SPAR+ is not to replace the initial protocol, but to support it as it evolves, by adapting it to the contemporary requirements of management research , marked by methodological hybridisation, the diversification of formats and the emergence of new scientific areas.

Beyond this proposal, a broader reflection is needed on the evolution of scientific protocols in a context of artificial intelligence and increasing automation of documentary research. The rise of semantic analysis tools, intelligent reading assistants and automated literature mapping platforms is profoundly transforming review practices. In this new ecosystem, protocols such as SPAR must also evolve, integrating intelligent interfaces, dynamic display assistants and even adaptive learning logic. The challenge will no longer be simply to structure the reading of

the literature, but to negotiate human-machine collaboration in the construction of scientific knowledge.

Thus, the SPAR+ model proposed here is not an end in itself, but a step towards a methodological overhaul of the literature review, combining rigour, reflexivity and openness to the future dynamics of academic research.

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