

LEADERSHIP, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNITY ACROSS BORDERS: IN MEMORY OF “THE MAD PROFESSOR”

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... with contributions from colleagues across the globe

Writing this editorial for the Dynamic Relationships Management Journal is both a privilege and a deeply personal sorrow. As editor, I have often written about the importance of relationships in and around management, but rarely has that theme felt as real, as immediate, and as painful as it does now. Robert Buch belonged to that rare group of scholars whose academic work and human presence were never separate things. He studied leadership, exchange, structure, support, performance, and the subtle dynamics that shape organizational life, but he also lived those dynamics with unusual integrity. He was a remarkable management scholar, a generous colleague, a gifted teacher, and, to many of us, a dear friend.

It is fitting that we remember him in this journal, because Robert’s work was deeply aligned with what DRMJ stands for. His research never reduced management to abstract technique or detached performance metrics. He was interested in the relational core of work: in how leaders affect followers, how organizational structures enable or constrain human flourishing, how support and exchange shape behavior, and how management is always, in the end, a matter of people. Already early in his career, Robert published important work on triangular employment relationships (Buch et al., 2010), and later he helped advance influential research on social and economic leader–member exchange (Kuvaas et al., 2012).

In the two DRMJ articles connected to him, that same scholarly signature is unmistakable. One article explores whether there can be an upside to leader narcissism, showing how political skill can transform traits often seen as destructive into outcomes that may actually benefit followers and organizations; the other examines how increased span

of supervision can undermine leadership style and, through that, weaken performance while increasing social loafing and turnover intention (Thompson et al., 2025a, 2025b). These are not marginal questions. They go to the heart of management theory and practice, and Robert addressed them with exactly the blend of conceptual sharpness, methodological care, and intellectual curiosity that made him such a distinctive scholar.

For me, though, and for many of us in Slovenia, Robert also represents something bigger than an individual academic career. He was part of the broader Norwegian–Slovene connection that mattered so much in the development of the Slovenian Academy of Management and this journal itself. Those ties with (in particular, but not exclusively) BI Norwegian Business School and later OsloMet were crucial in the earlier years of our international conferences and exchanges, and they mattered greatly when the journal was included in the Norwegian research database early on. But what made those ties meaningful was never only institutional strategy. It was people. It was the willingness to collaborate, to travel, to read each other’s work, to show up at conferences, to build something together across borders. Robert embodied that kind of international academic community. He made collaboration feel natural, not transactional; personal, not merely professional. In that sense, he belonged not only to Norwegian academia, but also to the wider scholarly friendships that helped shape management scholarship in Slovenia. Specifically, he was also one of the most vocal supporters of the DRMJ, on scholarly gatherings as well as on social media. We will not forget this. He very recently also became an editorial member of the journal, which further boosted his active support of the outlet.

And friendship matters here. Robert and I were dear friends. Ours was not only the friendship of co-authors, conference conversations, and academic exchange, but of quick messages, jokes, and the kind of easy contact that says more than formal collegiality ever could. We were on Snapchat too, and I still smile painfully at the memory of our snow challenges, in which Slovenia, predictably, stood no chance against Norway. That was Robert too: serious without being solemn, accomplished without becoming distant, playful without losing depth. He made academic life feel larger, warmer, and more alive.

The first tribute, contributed by his former PhD supervisor, captures beautifully the combination of rigor, independence, and warmth that marked Robert from the very beginning of his career:

I first met Robert when he started as a PhD student at BI Norwegian Business School, where I became his supervisor together with Anders Dysvik. He was fantastic to work with, extremely willing and able to learn, curious, but reluctant to take advice until he saw its value. After a while, he also demonstrated his creative side, where the article on chess in this issue is an excellent example. My main aim as a PhD supervisor is to help young scholars develop into first authors who take primary responsibility for high-quality research, not necessarily to help them get published while they are still PhD students. With Robert, it was very easy, and he also published highly interesting and relevant work early in his PhD education as the first author (Buch et al., 2010).

I usually don't become a personal friend of my PhD students, but Robert was an exception because of his warmth, openness, and also because he matched my broad interests in societal issues, politics, sports, and music. Thus, after he defended his dissertation in 2012 and left BI, we kept on working together and socializing until he sadly left us on January 8th this year.

*My best memories of Robert are from when he and Anders visited me in La Jolla, San Diego, during my sabbatical in 2011-2012. At SIOP in San Diego in 2012, he presented our work on social and economic leader-member exchange (LMX), which was later published in *Leadership Quarterly* (Kuvaas et al., 2012). Without Robert's willingness and ability to learn how to deal with the endogeneity problem,*

which was new to all of us, the publication would not have been possible. At the SIOP conference, he was confronted by George B. Graen, one of the originators of LMX theory, who did not understand why we needed a two-dimensional approach. To my expectations and satisfaction, he diligently explained why we did.

— Bård Kuvaas

That recollection says so much: Robert's intelligence, his patience, his ability to grow quickly into scholarly independence, and his quiet confidence when it mattered. Even when a legend of the field addresses you with a “can't you read, boy?!”

But those of us who knew him know equally well that his brilliance was never detached from kindness. The following words capture that with beautifully:

Robert was a man who, in the words of Pink Floyd, truly “shone like the sun.” Despite his formidable academic presence, he navigated the world with a profound humility that is often absent in the halls of higher learning. He didn't just teach; he served, offering a level of unwavering helpfulness that made students and colleague feel seen and supported. Like the diamond, Robert possessed a brilliance that was both luminous and delicate. He was taken from us too soon, but the light he cast was undeniable. In his living years, he managed to leave a glow that will guide those he mentored. It feels surreal that he is gone. Robert's legacy isn't found in a list of publications alone, but in the gentle, humble way he lifted others up. He was a winner who refused to act like one, a scholar who preferred to be a friend, and a light that—though extinguished here—refuses to fade from our memory. Shine on, Robert.

— Anders Dysvik

That phrase, “a scholar who preferred to be a friend,” stays with me. It also resonates with the many voices that describe Robert not merely as impressive, but as safe, fun, open, and truly present. He is remembered both as the force of his achievement and the ease of his companionship:

I met Robert first when I was a PhD student and what an inspiration he was, both as a scholar and as a person. Being the youngest Professor in Norway says something about Robert's determination, competence, and creativity. Later, we collaborated on research projects and developed a friendship. As a researcher, Robert had many ideas and was extremely effective. He was also someone who was fun and safe to be around, as he was funny, spontaneous, and truly cared for the people around him. Thanks for everything, Robert!

— Bryndis Steindorsdottir

Robert had another specialty: the ability to make academic encounters immediately human.

I first met Robert in Oslo at EAWOP in 2015, at one of those classic conference dinners where you finally get to meet the person who has written all those papers you've been reading. We chatted about our shared research interests (especially contingent workers and knowledge sharing/hiding) and compared notes about which international snacks that we liked. I continued to follow his work with interest and was happy to see him again at other conferences. I assumed we would meet many more times and have many more conversations – he was smart and kind and had so many interesting ideas. He will be very missed.

— Catherine E. Connelly

That is exactly right. Robert was one of those people who could talk about serious scholarship and international snacks in the same conversation, and somehow both would matter. He made academia less performative and more real.

Many recollections return to the way he noticed people, encouraged them, and changed the trajectory of their careers not through grand gestures, but through steady belief and concrete support.

I feel incredibly lucky to have met Robert early in my academic career, when we were both PhD students. What I valued most about him was his down-to-earth nature. Despite being a brilliant researcher,

he never saw himself as better than others and was always generous with his time and knowledge. Robert believed in me at an important moment in my career. He actively supported my application to OsloMet and put in a good word for me, which helped me secure my first permanent position in academia. That support has stayed with me ever since. Robert will always be part of my career and my daily work: the nickname he gave me, which he proudly added to the name tag on my office door, is still there. It makes me smile every time I see it. Thank you, Robert, for the support, the laughter, and the joy you brought into our work.

— Dominique Kost

Robert was a scholar, but also a citizen of an academic community:

One thing I deeply admired about Robert was how the creativity he brought to his research was always grounded in a deep understanding of the methods needed to explore his ideas. Furthermore, he was selfless in how he shared his knowledge, seeking not his own gain, but the advancement of the research and community.

— Ide Katrine Birkeland

That is an especially important point in a tribute published in a management journal. Robert's contribution to management was not only the set of findings he produced, important though those were. It was also the standard he set for how scholarship should be done: imaginatively, rigorously, and in the service of something larger than one's own reputation.

I first met Robert when we were doctoral students together at BI Norwegian Business School, and for nearly 20 years he remained a close and valued colleague, also during periods when we worked at different institutions. We collaborated academically at several points over the years, and I had the opportunity to experience his curiosity, work ethic, and ability to see new connections at close hand. He was a researcher who generated ideas and drew others into collaborative projects. Robert was a col-

league who met others with warmth and respect. He had a particular ability to notice and encourage the people around him, and he was as supportive in difficult times as in good ones. Through his conduct, he demonstrated what inclusive and trust-based leadership can look like in practice. That he himself conducted research on leader–member relations made it clear that he also practiced much of what he studied. He will be greatly missed as a colleague, collaborator, and friend.

— Karoline M. Hofslett Kopperud

Extending that same picture, his teaching can also be in focus:

Robert and I first began our academic journeys together as members of the same PhD cohort in Organizational Behavior and Leadership at BI Norwegian Business School. From those early days in Oslo, it was clear that Robert possessed a rare intellectual curiosity. Throughout our years as doctoral students, he was a constant source of insight, consistently sharing deep reflections and provocative new ideas that challenged our cohort to think more expansively about our field.

What defined Robert, however, was not just the brilliance of his mind, but the generosity of his spirit. He was remarkably selfless with his time, always ready to offer help or a constructive critique whenever it was needed. His diligence and sharp critical thinking served as a personal inspiration to me and many others, setting a high standard for what it means to engage in rigorous academic inquiry.

Robert’s commitment to the academy extended well beyond his research. He was a dedicated educator who truly “walked the talk.” He believed deeply in the principles of Self-Determination Theory, investing himself fully in fostering his students’ sense of mastery and autonomy. To Robert, teaching was not merely a duty but a vital expression of his scholarship.

He was a true scholar in every sense of the word—rigorous, compassionate, and deeply principled. He will be remembered not only for his contributions to the field of organizational behavior but for the integrity and kindness he brought to our community.

He will be greatly missed, but his influence remains with those of us fortunate enough to have known him as a colleague and a friend.

With respect,

— Sut I Wong

When so many people, across roles and institutions, describe the same pattern of rigor, kindness, wit, and generosity, we are no longer looking at isolated anecdotes. We are looking at character.

And still, if one only emphasized Robert’s kindness, one would miss his irreverence, his playfulness, and the way he resisted narrow boxes. This side is also vividly remembered by his dearest friends:

Robert was playful, sharp, and wonderfully impossible to fit into ordinary boxes. He hated narrow-mindedness and proudly called himself “The Mad Professor.” I’ll always remember the wild adventures we shared—our endless academic conversations, travels abroad, and hiking trips into the Norwegian wilderness. For me, Robert was a refuge: a rare kind of friendship where I felt completely accepted, and where life grew quiet and calm. I miss him more than I can say.

— Anders Gautvik-Minker

Robert could also profoundly shape other people’s lives:

Robert opened a door for me, professionally and personally, and then he kept opening doors. What began with a job interview became one of the most meaningful friendships of my life. We shared high highs and low lows, and we carried each other through more than I can really name here. Robert could be messy, funny, generous, and deeply encouraging, sometimes all at once, and he had a way of making life bigger for the people around him. He helped me make a life in Norway. I am rooted here now, and he is a big part of why. I just wish he still was a part of it. I am deeply thankful for Robert, and I miss him with my whole heart, with a force that still feels unreal. Goodbye, my friend.

— Jan Malte Runge

For me, Robert was not only a colleague, but also a close friend. His passing is still difficult to comprehend. Through our collaboration, I learned a great deal from Robert. He had a rare ability to combine sharp academic insight with creative curiosity, and working with him made me a better researcher. At the same time, he shared his knowledge and ideas with a generosity that made collaboration both natural and inspiring. Robert was ambitious on behalf of the research itself, but never in a way that placed himself at the center. He cared deeply about the ideas, the collaboration, and the people around him.

What I will remember most, however, is not only the academic discussions or the work on articles, but the moments around the work—the conversations at conferences, the laughter, and the boat trips where research and life flowed naturally into each other. Robert had a special ability to make such moments lively, meaningful, and memorable. He made academia a warmer and more human place to be. I will always be deeply grateful for everything I learned from him—and for the friendship we were fortunate to share. I often find myself thinking about what Robert would have said about a new idea or a piece of research we were working on.

Thank you for everything, Robert. Your friendship, generosity, and spirit will stay with us. We miss you deeply.

— Geir Thompson

That line about making life bigger for the people around him feels exactly right. It also explains why so many younger colleagues remember Robert not simply for advice, but for confidence, perspective, and emotional steadiness.

I got to know Robert Buch in 2024 when I joined Oslo Business School at OsloMet as an Associate Professor, just after completing my PhD. I had hoped imposter syndrome would fade with the new title, but it lingered. As my office neighbor, Robert quickly made me feel that I belonged. He treated my work as meaningful, reminded me that my role mattered, and invited me to the occasional ping-pong break when I needed perspective. He had a generous way of believing in my work, often more than I did my-

self, and made sure others saw it too. On the morning of the first lecture of my very own course, I arrived early, both excited and nervous. Robert was already there. He offered to show me the classroom, helped me set up, and asked to see my slides (which somehow he even found interesting). He was by definition a supportive leader. He will be deeply missed, and I hope to carry some of his spirit with me.

— Lewend Mayiwar

Robert and I first met a few weeks into my PhD. We were in the same research group and were to attend a meeting together. Before the meeting, a colleague told me that Robert would be there and described him as an immensely respected researcher. I was a bit intimidated, expecting someone who was strict and withdrawn. What I realized as soon as I met him was that he was completely the opposite - his warmth, humour, and intelligence shone through in every conversation. Soon after that, he surprised me on my first birthday in Norway, leaving a Banksy-inspired birthday card on my door. I immediately felt so welcomed and included that it lessened the sadness of being so far away from home. This is just one small example of his kindness and thoughtfulness, and there are many more. Whenever we worked together, he was always available with advice and support, for which I will always be deeply grateful. I admired how he was always so genuinely interested in research presented by others, asking thoughtful questions and readily offering encouragement.

I am so thankful to have met Robert. His dedication to research and his kindness toward those around him will always be remembered, and he will be deeply missed.

— Aleksandra Durovic

Robert was a fantastic researcher, colleague, and friend. When I started as a PhD student at OsloMet, Robert was one of the people who truly made my PhD life enjoyable. Despite, or maybe because of his early career success, he always had time to help, chat, and connect, regardless of a packed inbox. Most memorably, he always had time to drag you into a ping pong

game in the OsloMet basement, where the point was never about winning, but about connecting while having fun and learning something new — which is how Robert approached life, work, and research. When teaching together, he made every effort to transform dry material into something exciting, whether through a well-placed joke about a complex phenomenon or through creative use of new tools. Robert was generous with his energy and encouragement. I always had the sense that he was at least as happy for my successes as I was, if not more so. Thank you, Robert, for being a fantastic colleague and friend. You left us far too early, and you are deeply missed.

— August Nilsson

What emerges from all these voices is not a fragmented portrait, but a coherent one. Robert was brilliant, yes, but also warm. Productive, but never self-important. Methodologically serious, but creatively restless. Internationally respected, yet always available to the person next door. He helped build careers. He built friendships. He built confidence. He built bridges across institutions and countries. In management terms, one could say that he was an extraordinary relational resource. In human terms, one simply says: he was dear to us.

That is why his loss reaches so far. It is also why this editorial belongs in DRMJ, even above the fact that he was an author publishing in this outlet, its vocal supporter, and editorial board member. Robert’s life reminds us that the study of management is ultimately impoverished if it loses sight of friendship, trust, care, collegiality, and community. He contributed to management scholarship not only by publishing excellent research, but by showing that the best academic communities are built through generosity, intellectual openness, and human decency. He showed that leadership is not only a construct to be measured, but a way of being with others. He showed that support can be rigorous, that kindness can coexist with high standards, and that genuine scholarship often grows best in climates of trust, humour, and mutual respect.

For those of us connected through Slovenia and Norway and beyond, through conferences and collaborations, through journals and institutions,

Robert’s absence will be felt for a long time. But so will his presence. It remains in the articles he wrote, in the students and colleagues he encouraged, in the careers he helped shape, in the laughter he created, in the intellectual standards he embodied, and in the friendships he made possible. His family, too, naturally, above and beyond everything else. It remains in all those small moments that never enter a CV but define a life: an encouraging message, a birthday card, a hallway conversation, a shared meal at a conference, a ping-pong break, a joke before class, a snow challenge on Snapchat.

Robert Buch made academia better not only because he was a great scholar, but because he made it feel more like a community worth belonging to. That may be the deepest contribution of all.

Robert, thank you for your scholarship, your friendship, your generosity, your humour, and your light. We miss you deeply. We will remember you with admiration, gratitude, and affection.

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IN MEMORIAM

Robert Buch (1982-2026)

Robert Buch passed away suddenly on January 8, 2026, in his home just outside Oslo, Norway. He was 43 years old. Robert had been a professor of organizational psychology at Oslo Business School of Business, Oslo Metropolitan University, since 2017. Robert was originally trained as an electrician. But Robert had many talents and interests, and soon it was apparent that academic work was one of them. Robert obtained his bachelor's degree in psychology (2005) at the University of Oslo and his master's degree and doctorate (2012) at BI Norwegian Business School. After a couple of years as a researcher at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, he joined us at Oslo Business School in 2015. Robert was only 34 when he was appointed full professor.

Robert was very popular among the students both at bachelor's and master's level. He put all his effort into his lectures, and he distinguished himself as a committed and energetic lecturer and thesis advisor. Our students emphasized that as a teacher Robert stood out among his peers and it did not come as a surprise that students frequently nominated Robert for teacher of the year award at the university. For instance, during Robert's first year with us, the students wrote in the nomination letter that Robert was inspiring, engaging, skilled at listening to the students, and was a funny lecturer. The students also pointed out that Robert made sure that the students understood the material, for instance by using good examples and showing practical applications. Robert had a distinct style and was at the same time professional and dedicated to evidence base also in the lecture hall.

Robert also excelled as a researcher. Among his areas of expertise were leadership (particularly leader-member-exchange) and motivation. One important topic was the contrast between and consequences of intrinsic motivation (typically being motivated by the job itself) and extrinsic motivation (motivation through external rewards, such as bonuses). For instance, Robert's most cited article (Kuvaas et al., 2017) compares the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on key outcomes such as performance, commitment, turnover intention,

burnout, and work-family conflict. Recently he explored new topics such as the possible upside to leader narcissism, published in this journal (Thompson et al., 2025) and the downside of increasing span of control (Thompson, Buch & Thompson, 2025). Robert's publication list includes around 50 scientific articles, most of which were published in major international journals. In recent years he was the most cited researcher at the Business School. Robert enjoyed working with research partners in his wide network in Norway and internationally. In 2022, the research group in organizational psychology, headed by Robert, was rightly awarded the university R&D prize for research of high quality, international recognition, and practical relevance.

Robert was very ambitious and at the same time was inclusive and supportive of less merited colleagues. He was sociable, creative and liked to chat and have fun with his colleagues. Although he was well established as a full professor, he was curious and eagerly learned new academic topics and techniques, and he generously shared his enthusiasm for new ideas and methods.

We lost Robert far too soon. We are grateful for time we had with Robert and for his many valuable contributions to Oslo Business School.

Erik Døving

Ingvild S. Reymert

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