**Confronting the Crisis of Confidence in Management Studies: Why Senior Scholars
Need to Stop Setting a Bad Example**

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Jon Bilsberry, Joep Cornelissen, Rick Delbridge, Peter Gahan, Tine
Köhler, Vicky Roberts and Roy Suddaby for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of
this paper. Naturally any errors or weaknesses in the final version are my responsibility alone.

Abstract

There is an emerging crisis of confidence in management studies. This is expressed in growing disquiet about the lack of value in our research outputs and increasing frustration about the nature of teaching in business schools. This crisis of confidence can be understood as a response to a series of developments, including an apparent lack of practical or academic impact from most published research, a narrowing of focus in the field, increases in unethical behaviour, a downgrading of teaching and increased pressure in both publishing and teaching. Traditional academic values are coming into conflict with processes of rationalisation in business schools and universities. The changes driving these outcomes are long-run and reflect powerful institutional pressures, rendering them difficult to change. Nonetheless, established management studies scholars have a responsibility to address them. One way that they can show leadership in this regard is by setting a good example. Three suggestions can be made about how to do this: a rejection of the fiction that what we do is analogous to laboratory science; a rejection of the myth of what this essay calls 'the heroic workaholic publishing machine'; and a refusal to promote flawed approaches to assessing academic success.

INTRODUCTION: THE EMERGING CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

It should be a very exciting time to be a scholar in the field of management studies. There is an increasing range of organisational phenomena to be studied, an increasingly diverse range of methods to study them and locations in which to do so, a growing number of management scholars and increasing ethnic and national diversity among them (Corbett, Cornelissen, Delios & Harley, 2014). In many parts of the world, business schools are growing rapidly in size and prestige. Management academics are often relatively well-paid and their schools well-resourced. It is difficult to see this as anything but an attractive field in which to work, particularly compared to other parts of the academy where resources are scarce and employment often precarious.

Yet, apparently paradoxically, there is growing evidence of disquiet among management scholars. Increasingly, I hear colleagues express doubts about the value of what we do. This goes beyond concerns about the integrity of research (see for example Bergh, Sharp, Aguinis & Li, 2017). It takes the form of a series of doubts about whether a career as a management studies academic is a useful thing to devote one's life to. I have heard colleagues opine that if they had their time over they would almost certainly not take the path that they have chosen. Others tell me that they would hesitate to recommend a career as a management academic to others.

It would be easy to discount this as the complaints of a few malcontents among a generally happy population of scholars. But I hear expressions of disquiet from colleagues at all career stages: emeriti, eminent senior colleagues who are apparently at their peaks in terms of productivity and reputation, mid-career scholars and those just embarking on their careers. I hear them from scholars from a range of different national backgrounds, working in a range of countries. I read them in papers in scholarly journals (see for example Bothello & Roulet,

2018; Marinetto, 2018). And while I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy my own career and feel that it provides me with many rewarding experiences, I would be lying if I said that the concerns that I hear expressed did not resonate with my own observations of the field.

What then are these concerns? People I talk to bemoan the fact that, having entered an academic career to 'make a difference', most of what we do doesn't matter much to anyone but ourselves. Our research rarely translates into practical application. Not only that, but much of it is not cited or perhaps even read very often, suggesting a lack of impact not just in the wider world but in our own narrow management studies world. I hear complaints that in the current environment, there is intensifying pressure to maximise both quantity and quality of publications, the latter measured by journal impact factors and citation counts rather than any apparent concern with the inherent quality of what we produce. Books have been downgraded in importance and 'big hits' in 'A*' journals have become an obsession.

Colleagues lament the fact that many of the students we teach appear more interested in gaining a career credential than in learning. And we teach them in increasing numbers as universities in many parts of the world treat business schools as cash cows to fund less profitable parts of the institution. Perhaps as a corollary of this, management academics tell me that they are not regarded as 'real' academics by those in more traditional fields, but as a necessary evil in the contemporary university. At the same time, they say, business practitioners don't regard us as having 'real' jobs. Some scholars I speak to, particularly those who have moved from other disciplines such as psychology and sociology into business schools have used the term 'Faustian pact' to describe their feeling of having sold their souls to the devil for the apparent benefits of entering business academia.

Are such concerns new? Probably not, but I think they are intensifying. Looking back at *Rhythms of Academic Life* (Frost & Taylor, 1996) as I developed this essay, I found

contributors touching on some negative aspects of academic careers, such as work pressure (for example Jackson, 1996) and potential conflicts between one's values and the demands of research (Quinn, O'Neill & Debebe, 1996). Nonetheless, while many of the contributions address challenges faced in academic careers, the overwhelming tone of the book is positive. My observation is that the present situation represents an intensification of previous disquiet about aspects of the academic career, which goes well beyond the need to manage career challenges.

Does this apparent crisis of confidence matter? It would be easy, as noted above, to see these concerns as the moaning of privileged malcontents, who don't know how good they've got it. But I think this would be too easy a way to brush aside the concerns of many scholars. A healthy and vigorous community of scholars requires a shared commitment to the overall project of management studies and a shared sense that what we do is meaningful and has positive outcomes. To that extent, it seems to me that taking these concerns seriously is important, as a first step towards thinking about what might be done about them. Before we can think about remedies, however, it is necessary to think about causes – why do so many people I talk to express such disquiet?

WHY THE EMERGING CRISIS?

The roots of the emerging crisis can be found in significant changes to business schools and the work of management studies academics. In outlining the key features, and causes of the crisis, I will deal first with issues around research and publishing and then move to consider teaching and learning. Of course, this distinction is to an extent artificial, but it serves to make the discussion easier to digest. I should also make clear that I recognise that service and administration are important activities and that in many places scholars have experienced increased pressure from them in recent years which is likely to contribute to disillusionment

with academic life. Having said that, for space reasons I will restrict my focus by concentrating on the core academic activities.

Research and Publishing

Why might management scholars feel that their research and publishing activities were unsatisfying or even meaningless? To put it bluntly, this is a completely reasonable response to the fact that most of the research and publishing that most of us do has little or no impact. There is no doubt that many scholars have devoted their efforts to considering how research might address significant real world problems (see Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi & Tihanyi, 2016) and management conferences often have themes which emphasise such impact. Nonetheless, it is hard to find recent published management articles which can be shown to have had any significant impact.

Of course, there are significant challenges in translating research into practice, even in fields like medicine which devote a great deal of effort to this project (Anderson, 2015). To add to this general problem, the incentives in most business schools encourage a particular approach to research.

The strong incentives to publish in top rated journals, provided by widely adopted practices of performance management in academia, foster the motivation of researchers to adjust their research and writing styles to the editorial policies and criteria of these journals. Performance managers in academia often infer the quality of publications from the quality of the journals in which they are published and link contingent rewards to it, such as funding, promotion and pay (Vogel, Hattke & Petersen, 2017: 1707).

The high impact journals typically publish papers which have two key characteristics: a focus on theory (Hambrick, 2007); and a focus on quantitative work which employs increasingly complex statistical techniques (Harley, 2015). The focus on theory means that success as an academic almost inevitably goes hand in hand with life in ‘the theory cave’ (Biggart, 2016). Moreover, there is a focus in top management journals on ‘correlational theorising’ (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013) and on incremental advances in knowledge.

The pressure to publish in high impact journals appears to deter many from submitting innovative or non-traditional papers (Miller et al., 2010). The result is a growth of safe, narrow, positivist, ‘scientific’ papers, which is leading to a homogenization of research (Corbett et al., 2014; Harley, 2015). This homogenization threatens a narrowing of what is considered legitimate and rigorous research and of the kinds of theoretical and practical contributions which are made (Harley & Cornelissen, in press). It is manifested not just in the dominance of particular styles of quantitative research, but also in an increasing tendency for qualitative research to employ ‘templates’, which mimic positivist approaches (Cornelissen, 2016). Not only is this likely to undermine the practical relevance of research, but it seems likely to undermine the pluralism and diversity which characterises a healthy intellectual sphere.

Moreover, the emphasis on technique means that papers which make it into the top journals are very often characterised by highly technical approaches to research methods which deliver apparently precise results, but which are unlikely to have much meaning to practitioners. It may be that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the theoretical and ontological assumptions which underpin ‘quality’ management publications on one hand and those that underpin managerial practice (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). The requirements of success in the contemporary business school mean that many scholars are faced with a stark

choice – do they want to have an impact on practice or do they want to get tenure and promotion?

This might seem paradoxical at a time when it seems business schools in many countries are under increasing pressure to demonstrate their relevance to, and impact on, business. I would argue that there is a disconnect between what is rewarded in terms of career success and the apparent desire of many leaders of business schools to demonstrate relevance and impact. It appears, however, that even within the ‘rules of the game’ of the contemporary business school most scholars are unlikely to succeed. That is, even if we put aside the question of real world impact, few of us will produce work which has an impact even within the world of management scholarship.

It is a sad fact that few in the management studies community will publish in the most prestigious journals. Those who do publish are likely to have particular characteristics and to write particular sorts of papers. In a large-scale bibliometric analysis, Vogel et al (2017) explored the predictors of publication in high-impact journals. They found that interdisciplinarity and innovativeness mattered, but also that papers by Anglo-Saxon authors, by authors from prestigious universities and papers which used quantitative methods were more likely to be published. Macdonald and Kam (2011) argue that the distribution of authors in top management journals is highly skewed, being dominated by a relatively small group of scholars, with most others unable to publish in these outlets.

This is partly a numbers game. More and more papers are submitted to journals and thus rejection rates are increasing (Clark, Wright & Ketchen, 2016). Typically, prestigious journals reject well over 90% of what is submitted, which means that most papers have little chance of success in the top journals. If we add the fact that despite the norms of objectivity and neutrality in editorial processes there remains a political element in terms of who and

what is published (Macdonald & Kam, 2011), then for most of us the chances are slim indeed. Of course, papers which are rejected often find a home eventually, but this is typically in a lower-ranked journal. Most scholars are, therefore, being set an impossible task and doomed to failure in their chosen field, at least in terms of how success is currently defined in terms of publications in the most prestigious journals.

Even when papers are accepted and published by journals, the evidence that they have any impact on the scholarly world is limited. Again, there are exceptions. We can all name papers which have been cited extensively and which appear to have shaped fields within management studies. We commonly equate citation with impact, but even when papers are cited many of them will have little discernible impact on the field. In fact, it seems likely that many papers are cited in a fairly cursory way (Marinetto, 2018).

It gets worse, however, when we recognise that many papers which are published are *never* cited. Estimates vary widely, but there is agreement that a significant percentage of what is published is not cited (Marinetto, 2018). Further, just as success in publishing is skewed, so is citation. Macdonald and Kam's (2010) analysis of citations among leading management scholars (those who publish and are cited prolifically) suggests that they cite papers in the journals which they publish in, they cite themselves, and they cite other prolific authors. This leads Macdonald and Kam to argue that citation patterns can be characterised as "citation by an elite of an elite for an elite" (2010: 189). Little wonder that so many scholars are rarely or never cited.

The dominant approach to assessing performance produces a further set of side effects. In the current context, where quality is increasingly measured by citations and journals are ranked based on citations, there are incentives for journal editors to 'game' impact factors, to increase the journals' prestige, for example by requiring authors to cite a certain number of

publications from the journal when revising their papers for publication. Similarly, there are incentives for authors to encourage others to cite their work (Macdonald & Kam, 2010).

As discussed above, the emphasis on 'science' in publishing has the effect of undermining the legitimacy of alternative approaches and reducing pluralism in research (Harley, 2015). This means that the dominant trajectory of research is towards homogenization, reflecting in large part the requirements of publishing rather than the pursuit of diverse forms of knowledge about diverse phenomena.

Finally, the increasing pressure on scholars and business schools to compete for prestige, success and funding largely based on quantity and quality of output appears to have driven the growth of ethically questionable conduct in research and publishing (Honig, Lampel, Siegel & Drnevich, 2014). While it is difficult to be certain about the level and trajectory of unethical conduct, there is evidence of disturbingly high incidence in our field (Bedeian, Taylor & Miller, 2010; Honig & Bedi, 2012; Banks, O'Boyle, Pollack, White, Batchelor, Whelpley, Abston, Bennett & Adkins, 2016). There have been several very high profile cases which have led to retractions of papers and in some cases the resignation or dismissal of professors. The establishment of the Retraction Watch website (<https://retractionwatch.com>) provides some indication of the level of concern across disciplines about unethical conduct and a search of the website shows clearly that management scholars are not without sin.

Ethically questionable conduct covers a range of practices, which might be seen as varying in seriousness, but which are united by apparently breaching norms of academic conduct. These include practices such as self-plagiarism, publishing multiple papers from the same dataset, 'p-hacking' or other forms of data manipulation and fabrication of results. Scholarly publishing is largely based on trust that what we say we did in our research is what we did and there is growing unease among management scholars about the increasing incidence of

misconduct (Harley, Faems & Corbett, 2014). The fact remains, however, that the current incentives which operate in academic management studies are such that it would appear quite rational at least in a means-ends sense, to breach ethical norms if the risk of detection is judged to be low.

It would seem that we are caught in a bind. We work in a field where we might hope to have an impact on policy and practice, yet to pursue this would be counterproductive in career terms given what we know about what gets published. Not only that, but even in the world of academic management studies much published research has little or no impact. It gets worse when we consider additional side effects of the current environment, in which individuals are assessed on the quantity and quality of what they publish and journal quality is measured on the basis of citation counts and journal lists. Is it any wonder that scholars are disillusioned?

Teaching and Learning

For a long time, career success as a business school academic has been based primarily on publication success. Good teaching has been essentially a hygiene factor. For example, in her chapter in *Rhythms of Academic Life*, Gallos writes of beginning her academic career in the 1980s and learning “the requirements for success in academia: publish often and appropriately, teach acceptably...” (1996: 11). It seems clear, however, that as pressure to publish increases there is likely to be a corresponding increase in the displacement of emphasis on teaching. Certainly, I am increasingly struck by the view of younger colleagues, yet to gain tenure, that they simply cannot afford to waste any time on teaching beyond that which is required to ensure adequate student evaluations. I admit freely that, while I believe that devotion to teaching is central to a rewarding academic career, I would hesitate to advise them to change their approach given the importance of publications for tenure decisions.

The trends in research and publishing which I have discussed above are likely to be having a deleterious effect on teaching for a number of reasons. First, the pressure to publish more and 'better' papers means that to be successful in career terms academics must devote more time and effort to their publishing. This inevitably limits the time available for other activities, including time to devote to teaching and teaching-related activities (Miller et al., 2010). Second, I have argued above that the kinds of papers which are commonly deemed as high-quality are likely to be the kinds of papers which do not translate well into knowledge for practitioners, emphasising as they do theory and technique. Such papers are also relatively unlikely to translate well into resources for teaching, except perhaps in specialist theory and methods subjects. Third, and a corollary of the kinds of publications which are valued in the contemporary business school, there is little incentive for scholars to divert effort from articles to teaching-focused textbooks, which are widely deemed 'worthless' in terms of career success.

These developments are taking place at a time when business schools in many parts of the world have grown massively and continue to grow (see Pettigrew, Cornuel & Hommel, 2014). In many contexts this growth reflects another development, reductions in public spending on the higher education sectors, which generates the need for universities to expand their revenue sources. As mentioned earlier, many business schools act as 'cash cows', without which other parts of the institution would cease to be viable (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2016: 1-3). Much of the revenue of many business schools is derived from student fees. With massive growth in demand for business qualifications, particularly from East Asia, it is little wonder that in many universities business schools have increased in size, often very significantly, to meet this demand and deliver resources to their parent institutions.

How do these developments shape the experience of teaching? There is increasing pressure to process large numbers of students, who are increasingly regarded as customers who are buying a product from the institution and delivering revenue (Finney & Finney, 2010).

Within this kind of model of education, it would be unsurprising if the quality of students became a less important consideration than their willingness to pay. Nor would it be surprising if the quality of education which was delivered became a less important consideration than the imperative to ‘process’ students as efficiently as possible. It would also be unsurprising if in some places faculty of business schools were placed under pressure to ensure that ‘customers’ were happy with the product they were buying, leading to an emphasis on ‘engaging’ students rather than teaching them. It is not uncommon to hear complaints of pressure to lower academic standards as a means to keep customers happy.

An additional way that many universities seek to boost revenue through their business schools is via executive education, often in the form of modules which are tailored to a specific firm’s needs. Within this model scholars are to an extent ‘rented out’ to deliver modules. The supplier-customer relationship is even more clear and the pressures to keep the customer happy even stronger than in more conventional teaching. As business schools seek to generate revenue and demonstrate relevance to the needs of business, scholars who are required to deliver executive education may well find themselves having to put aside concerns with academic rigour in their teaching in favour of customer satisfaction.

It would be facile to argue that business school teaching is directly analogous to production work in a Taylorist factory, but at the same time difficult to argue that there are not striking parallels in terms of large student numbers, standardised delivery of teaching and pressure to process students as efficiently as possible. Of course, I am not suggesting that this is the case in every unit in every business school in every part of the world, but clearly the trend is in

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3 this direction. And just as the workers in factories in the early 20th century became
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5 dissatisfied and demotivated from working in factory production systems, it is unsurprising
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7 that management scholars experience this model as unsatisfying and demotivating. The fact
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9 that this is taking place within institutions which downplay the value of teaching and
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11 incentivise publications can only be expected to intensify these effects.
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13 14 15 **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?** 16

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18 In the preceding discussion, I have argued that we can understand the emerging crisis of
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20 confidence in management studies as reflecting a series of related causes, all of which
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22 involve changes in practices in business schools. Business schools (and the universities in
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24 which many of them are embedded) are increasingly in competition for scarce resources,
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26 which means that they are in competition for students and staff. In turn, this has led to an
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28 ‘arms race’ (Enders, 2014), in which the weapons are rankings and prestige. In this context,
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30 an emphasis on and incentivisation of articles in high impact journals and a downgrading of
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32 the significance of teaching is quite rational.
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36 The main changes in business schools in recent years can be understood as reflecting a
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38 process of rationalisation in the Weberian sense. They involve an increasing and
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40 overwhelming emphasis on formal or ‘means-ends’ rationality. If the end is to have a
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42 prestigious and highly ranked school, which attracts credential- and prestige-seeking students
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44 and executive education and consultancy clients and can charge them a premium, many of the
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46 changes discussed above are entirely rational from the point of view of university and
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48 business school managers. And of course, in institutions where this is the dominant
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50 rationality, it is completely rational for scholars to ‘play the game’, if they want jobs,
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52 security, advancement, status, and so on.
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While formal rationality appears increasingly to define the contemporary business school, it is important to remind ourselves that this is not the only form of rationality. If we focus on substantive rationality – rationality regarding values rather than simply instrumental goals – then it is possible to make sense of the disquiet expressed by many management studies scholars. Traditionally, the ethos underpinning academic social science has been characterised by value being placed on knowledge for its own sake, rather than for instrumental reasons, and on creativity and pluralism in research (see Hammersley, 2011: 1-4). To this might be added the nurturing of student learning and a concern with imparting knowledge for its own sake. I am not naïve enough to think that that there was once an academic golden age, in which all or most academics were motivated by the pursuit of this ethos. Nor do I argue that the trends I have mapped out above are restricted to business schools, although it seems clear that they are more pronounced here than in some other parts of the academy.

Nonetheless, to the extent that scholars in management studies subscribe to a traditional academic ethos – and I believe that many of us do – there would seem to be a conflict between two quite different rationalities. To put it another way, many management studies academics are trapped in Weber's 'iron cage' as processes of rationalisation continue apace. Based on my conversations and observations this is experienced as a tension for many management academics, between what they *believe* they should be doing to be 'good' academics and what they *know* they need to be doing to survive and hopefully prosper. The reference to a Faustian pact which some colleagues make starts to seem understandable in this context..

One might well argue that the fact that some members of the management studies community are dissatisfied is hardly a problem. The field is booming and there appears to be no shortage

of young scholars anxious to join the ranks of management academia. One might also argue that the kind of tension between different forms of rationality and between one's own personal values and an instrumental rationality is just part of working life. In a world riven by war and in which millions of people are displaced, not to mention endemic homelessness and inequality in many developed countries, it might seem a bit rich for privileged management scholars to be feeling sorry for themselves.

Nonetheless to the extent that we think management studies matters, or should matter, then we surely should be concerned about the current state of our field. The crisis is a problem precisely because it is more than a rumbling of discontent from a few disaffected individuals who don't know how good they have it. Rather, as I have set out above, there are real causes for this disaffection. These causes are themselves a threat to the field, not because they are likely to lead to its demise, but because they signal a lack of impact, a narrowing of the field, a growing set of ethical problems and a downgrading of the importance and quality of teaching.

This suggests that it is important to consider what might be done in response to these problems. It would be easy to sink into pessimism. High-level changes in social and economic systems and resulting institutional shifts are simply beyond the power of individuals to change. For example, the massive growth of business schools and concomitant changes in teaching are not things which we, as scholars, can hope to change. Moreover, there appear to be many in the management studies community who are comfortable with the current situation, or at least accept it as normal. Others are active champions of the trends which I have mapped out above. I would argue, however, that merely accepting that we can change nothing is counterproductive.

Others have put forward suggestions for change. Some have gone as far as arguing that management education is so dysfunctional that we should ‘shut down the business school’ (Parker 2018). Most suggestions which seek to address the kinds of problems I have discussed above are rather more modest. These include changes to incentives (see Bothello & Roulet, 2018), ‘slow publishing’ (Marinetto, 2018), different ways of assessing impact (Aguinis, Shapiro, Antonocopoulou & Cummings, 2014; Bartunek, 2014; Buckley, 2016), changes to research practice and reporting (Schwab & Starbuck, 2017) and refocusing research on practical problems (Biggart, 2016). The recently-formed Responsible Research in Business and Management network has developed a manifesto of recommendations which proposes a range of actions (<https://www.rrbm.network/>). My aim here is not to discount any of these suggestions, nor to rehash them, but rather to add to them.

The suggestions I want to put forward could all be placed under the umbrella of leadership. By leadership I do not mean just those in formal leadership positions in business schools, although I would like to think that they might play a role. Rather, I mean those of us who are established scholars and who have both the ability and the responsibility to do what we can to address problems identified above. For many early-career scholars, it would be difficult to challenge the status quo, but for established scholars less so.

I want to put forward three suggestions. They are all things which I think may have the effect of challenging the norms, practices and behaviours which are contributing to undermining management studies and feeding the crisis of confidence. I hope that they provide a useful starting point for action and for continued discussion of the issues set out above. My simple message here is: established scholars need to stop setting a bad example if they are to show effective leadership in combatting the crisis of confidence. In putting forward these

suggestions, I make no claim of being without sin in terms of the example I set. Rather, I present these as goals to which we might all aspire.

Bad Example 1: Pretending We're (an Idealised Version of) Laboratory Scientists

I have argued that the increasing dominance of 'science' in management studies research and publishing is a contributing factor to a lack of impact, to questionable research practice and to a narrowing of the kinds of knowledge which are considered legitimate in our field. Yet, if we look at leading management studies journals, the norm is to publish papers which are presented as 'science' (Harley et al., 2014; Harley, 2015). It is time for management studies scholars to stop pretending that what we do is analogous to laboratory science. More correctly, management scholars should stop trying to conform to an *idealised version of what laboratory scientists do*. For social studies of science have long shown the disjuncture between the way that scientific studies are presented in reports and articles and the messy reality of how laboratory scientists actually do their work and construct knowledge (see for example Latour and Woolgar, 1986).

I should make clear that my argument here is not specifically against experimental research or 'lab' research in management studies. Indeed, I would argue that there is room for a plurality of approaches to knowledge production and that experimental research is no less legitimate than any other approach (but no *more* legitimate either). Rather, my concern is with the fact that the dominant approach to conducting and presenting research is in the form of positivist hypothesis testing, which mimics to a greater or lesser extent the ideal-typical form of laboratory science.

As I have foreshadowed above, the science model as applied in management studies produces research which, in contrast to much physical science research, is difficult or impossible to

translate into practice. One explanation for this may be that the underlying ontology of this sort of research is inconsistent with that underlying practice (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). It may also be that this kind of research, which is characterised by a focus on (often incrementally) advancing theory and by often complex statistical analysis, simply does not deliver results which have clear or significant practical implications. If there was a collective move away from this model and more recognition of the value of a plurality of forms of research, perhaps there would be more impact.

Further, several significant ethical issues reflect in large part the dominance of the science model in management research (see Locke, 2007). I am not suggesting that this model causes unethical behaviour – clearly there is unethical behaviour by scholars across different research methods and ultimately the blame must lie with individual and collective ethical judgements by scholars and with norms within the research community – but nonetheless the dominance of the science model plays a role.

For example, ‘P-hacking’ is a term which describes a variety of practices which involve manipulating data or analysis with the intention of delivering results which are statistically significant (see Simmons, Nelson and Simonsohn, 2011 and Banks et al., 2016 for discussion of the specific kinds of practices involved). P-hacking is attractive to researchers because within the science model of hypothetico-deductive research one is required to test hypotheses and (despite Popper’s argument for falsification) demonstrate support for them if one wishes to publish one’s papers. Many management scholars subscribe to the fiction that when we do research we theorise, hypothesise, collect data and try as hard as we can to disprove hypotheses (or to find support for the null hypothesis) (see Locke, 2007). Those hypotheses which resist our best efforts at falsification are accepted as provisionally true. In practice, if we fail to find support for our hypotheses we are unlikely to have our papers published (see

Schwab, Abrahamson, Starbuck & Fidler, 2011 and O'Boyle, Banks & Gonzalez-Mulé, 2017).

A related practice which is often characterised as ethically suspect is hypothesising after the results are known (often referred to as HARKing). HARKing also reflects the fictional account of research which many scholars adhere to. If we were simply to be honest about how research is typically done – an iterative process in which we do some preliminary theorising, then run some analysis, then retheorise as necessary if the results are not what we expected – then p hacking and HARKing would cease to be attractive ways to enhance publishability. By being more honest, and admitting that the process of drawing conclusions from empirical research is an inductive or abductive process (and indeed can never be a product of deductive reasoning, which is logically impossible in empirical research (Lipton, 2004; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010)) scholars would remove the incentive for p-hacking and HARKing, produce more honest and realistic accounts of how we work and perhaps produce better and more rigorously derived conclusions (Schwab & Starbuck, 2017; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017; Harley & Cornelissen, in press).

Of course, the science model is highly institutionalised and is unlikely to be dislodged in a hurry, notwithstanding welcome developments such as the foundation of *Academy of Management Discoveries*, which explicitly advocates abductive research. But a starting point would be for established scholars to challenge the myth that we do the same thing as (idealised) physical scientists, particularly by publishing research which explicitly acknowledges the reality of how most of us work and which embraces other methodologies. This would alleviate some of the pressures for unethical conduct, encourage methodological pluralism and in encouraging pluralism may lead to more practically-relevant research.

Bad Example 2: Perpetuating the Myth of the Heroic Workaholic Publishing Machine

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I've lost count of the number of times I've attended conference keynotes and seen high-profile professors, who are at the leading edge of success as defined by publication outputs, career success and prestige, speak to the audience about their careers. The usual justification for this kind of presentation is that it will inspire young scholars to aim high and that such speakers are setting a good example. I would argue that, in fact, presentations of this kind typically set a very bad example indeed. When a star professor lists her/his many publishing achievements and, as I have heard them do on occasion, boasts about how many hours a week s/he works this is likely to have several outcomes.

Some early-career scholars are likely to see such exemplars, who are surely outliers, as typical of scholars in their field. This can lead to imposter syndrome (Bothello & Roulet, 2018) and feelings that the game is just too difficult to succeed in. Others are likely to see the speakers as representing role models and to seek to emulate them. Some may succeed at doing so, but most will not. The example which is being presented commonly involves an individualistic pursuit of success through publishing in top journals, having high citation counts, and so on. In my view, to the extent that this is an outcome this just feeds the problems that are generating the current crisis of confidence. For example: the pressure to publish is likely to drive unethical behaviour (Banks et al., 2016); to encourage 'fast food' publishing (Marinetto, 2018); and to lead to disappointment on the part of young scholars when they are not able to emulate these academic heroes and heroines.

Much less often, I have attended keynotes by successful scholars who have presented more balanced and realistic accounts of their success. They talk about how their own careers have diverged from the ideal-typical one, about their failures, about good and bad luck and how this has played a role, about the choices they have made in balancing work against other parts of their lives, about the diversity of what they have researched and published and how they

integrate their research and teaching. They present a realistic account of academic life, which doesn't gild the lily by downplaying the many challenges. By showing early-career scholars that it is possible to succeed without necessarily emulating one of the handful of superstar academics in the field, such exemplars play a valuable role. Moreover, by focusing on more than a narrow concern with publishing success, they remind others of the importance of teaching.

I have used the example of keynotes here, but of course established scholars can set a good example in other ways, for example simply by how they conduct their research and publishing activities, by mentoring early career colleagues and by participating in workshops and other professional development activities. If established scholars set a good example, this might have the effect not just of encouraging early career scholars to broaden their outlook on what they should be doing, but also to remove some of the causes of the crisis of confidence.

Bad Example 3: Boosting a Flawed System

In his 2016 chapter entitled 'Read the Damn Article', Buckley makes a plea to deans and department heads to use their intelligence and assess the quality of papers by reading them, rather than falling back on journal lists as the arbiter. I do not intend to revisit the arguments against journal lists made by Buckley (2016) and others. Rather, I want to pick up on Buckley's point about the need for academic administrators and others to use their skill and intelligence when judging performance, and extend it. I am constantly struck by how willing deans and department heads are to embrace the use of journal lists and associated crude measures of performance, notably citation counts. In many conversations which I've had or listened to, senior administrators have said things like "Oh, of course I know lists aren't perfect measures", but then proceeded to use them in making hiring, tenure and promotion decisions as if they were. Clearly there are powerful institutional pressures to measure and

grade performance. Lists and citation counts provide simple and apparently fair ways of doing so, but they are crude measures which discourage diversity, encourage unethical behaviour and cause stress to early career scholars.

Journal lists and citation counts are concrete manifestations of a set of norms and practices in business schools which, I have argued above, are undermining our field. Yet despite the obvious intelligence and education of most scholars, many not only condone current practices but actively boost them. Twenty years ago, when I started attending management conferences, I was struck by the language that I heard. People spoke in awe of ‘big hits’. Those whose work had made it into ‘top five’ journals were paid homage by junior colleagues. If anything, this kind of language has become more prevalent. Some might say that the language people use is merely a reflection of the reality they inhabit, but I would argue that how we talk about the milieu in which we work shapes not just our understanding of it, but our behaviours.

At conferences and workshops I hear panels of journal editors vying to claim the toughest review processes and the highest rates of desk rejections. Scholars compete with one another by swapping war stories about the punitive nature of review processes which they have succeeded in navigating. I hear people discuss tactics for boosting citation counts. I could go on, but I think I have made my point. As I have argued above, in the current environment, it is clearly rational in a formal sense to ‘play the game’. What bothers me, however, is the enthusiasm with which so many established scholars don’t just play the game, but actively champion it. As long as successful scholars set this kind of example, it is hard to see how the system will not be perpetuated and indeed strengthened.

CONCLUSION

Looking back at *Rhythms of Academic Life*, I am struck by the authors' optimism, career challenges notwithstanding. I am also struck by the book as an expression of an academic world, which we might now look back upon nostalgically. The book paints a very different picture of academic life from the competitive, transactional one which we now inhabit. It presents a rich picture of a multitude of different paths to success in academic life, rather than success as measured purely by 'big hits' and citation counts. It emphasises the fact that career success also includes life-long relationships with colleagues and collaborators, which are of intrinsic value rather than simply means to produce and publish more.

Of course, it is entirely possible that even at the time the book was published, the view of academia which it encapsulated was not an accurate description of contemporary academic life but rather an expression of how academic life *should* be; a set of aspirations. As I have noted above, it would be foolish to imagine that there was once a golden age, but for me *Rhythms of Academic Life* remains important because it provides rich accounts of the different ways to navigate academic careers and provides us with examples of alternatives to the model which seems increasingly to dominate our world.

The proposals which I have put forward for ways that we might 'push back' are modest and limited. By themselves, they will not reverse current trends in our field. Nonetheless, there is growing evidence of a crisis of confidence in management studies, which has real and identifiable causes. Unchecked, these causes are very likely to undermine the value of what we do. Those of us who have survived and thrived within this system have a responsibility to challenge those aspects of it which we see as undermining the value of the management studies project and feeding the emerging crisis of confidence. One way that we can seek to do this is by setting a good example to our colleagues.

There are powerful institutional forces which push business schools along the current trajectories. There are powerful vested interests in the continuation of the current model of management research and education. It would be folly to think that change can happen easily or quickly. Indeed, things may get worse. The Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned by Mussolini’s fascists wrote “I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will” (Gramsci, 2011: 299). In confronting the emerging crisis of confidence in management studies, this would seem a sensible position to take.

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