

A R T I C L E S

“AN A IS AN A”: THE NEW BOTTOM LINE FOR VALUING ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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In sports, the phrase “a win is a win” refers to the bottom line in those competitions: winning a game. How the game was won is not as important as the fact that it was won. In many ways, we have reached a similar point in the management field. The increased pressure to publish in “A” journals means the new bottom line for valuing academic research is “an A is an A.” Faculty recruiting committees and promotion and tenure panels readily discuss how many A’s a candidate has published and how many A’s are needed for a favorable decision, while conversations about the distinctive intellectual value of a publication are often secondary to its categorical membership in journals. We describe reasons why this new bottom line has taken hold and delineate its positive and negative consequences. Also, we offer insights for a variety of stakeholders, including (a) nonspecialist academics in all management domains, including scholars from universities worldwide because the new bottom line for valuing academic research is a global phenomenon, (b) university administrators and funding agencies interested in evaluating research quality and impact, and (c) individuals interested in responsible scholarship and in addressing the current credibility crisis in management. Finally, we offer a forward-looking analysis and policy implications of how to address challenges associated with the new bottom line for valuing academic research.

Following a centuries-old tradition, modern research universities ground their legitimacy and authority in the value of published knowledge, which provides an objective and measurable standard for institutional performance and control (Wellmon & Piper, 2017). This publication ethos has gradually become embedded in universities’ growing managerialism and economic rationality (Callahan, 2018; Lorenz, 2012; Roberts & Donahue, 2000), or what

some critics have referred to as the “McDonaldization” of academe (Hays & Wynyard, 2002; Parker & Jary, 1995), the “market” university (Berman, 2012), and the “managerial” university (Anderson, 2008). University performance management and resource allocation systems, for example, are increasingly driven by a corporate audit culture where resources and rewards are contingent on quantifiable measures of research value (Lorenz, 2012; Parker & Jary, 1995; Walsh, 2011).

An increasingly common method for measuring the value of research derives from the quality of the academic journals in which the research is published (Garfield, 2005). In other words, the higher the

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judged quality of the journal, the higher the attributed quality and hence value of its published articles (Bedeian, 1996). The same procedure is used to measure the total value of research produced by a particular individual, which is done by simply adding all articles published in journals deemed to be of high quality. This journal-proxy method provides a relatively objective and generalizable measure of research value that can apply across individual researchers, research disciplines, and academic organizations.

The growing use of journal-proxy measures of research value has led to ever-increasing pressure on academics to publish in elite journals to gain professional rewards and status (e.g., De Rond & Miller, 2005; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Hogler & Gross, 2009; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016; Shapiro, 2017). In business schools around the world these elite journals are identified by different labels, including “A,” “top,” “premiere,” and other designations such as “A+,” “A*,” or even “A++” and “A**” that indicate their high status. We will refer to them simply as “A journals.”

The need to identify which are A journals and which are not has led to a myriad of journal ranking lists that vary by disciplinary orientation and the metric used to rank journals (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Ryazanova, McNamara, & Aguinis, 2017; Van Noorden, 2010). These lists serve as an indicator of the meritorious quality of the journals and, by extension, the respective scholarly publications included therein and the researchers who authored those publications. The use of such lists in assessing the bottom line for valuing academic research (i.e., how many A’s) has spread across universities in Asia, Europe, North America, and South America (Ryazanova et al., 2017), and across academic disciplines (e.g., Deegan, 2016; Polonsky & Ringer, 2009; Tadjewski, 2016; Treviño, Mixon, Funk, & Inkpen, 2010; Xu, Poon, & Chan, 2014).

Clearly, the distinction between A and other journals emerged some time ago (Garfield, 1972; Van Fleet, McWilliams, & Siegel, 2000). What is ominously different today, however, is the *excessive* attention to journal lists that signal which journal articles count in terms of promotion, tenure, and rewards decisions and which ones do not (Connelly & Gallagher, 2010; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992; Honig et al., 2018; Shapiro, 2017). This “an A is an A” dictum serves as an expressive addendum to the more general call to publish or perish.

The institutional logic of universities has changed in the last two or three decades, which has forced

them to change the way they operate and function (Edwards & Roy, 2017; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Business schools have gone through many transformations, and these have made the issue of faculty evaluation and rewards suddenly more salient (e.g., Certo, Sirmon, & Brymer, 2010; Khurana, 2007; Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007). Indeed, the “an A is an A” phenomenon has now reached a point that, in many cases, faculty-recruiting committees and promotion and tenure panels readily discuss how many A’s a candidate has published and how many A’s are needed for a favorable decision, while conversations about the distinctive intellectual value of a publication are often secondary to its categorical membership in journals (Davis, 2015; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Macilwain, 2013). For management researchers, this categorization can translate into a stark dichotomy, and imposed choice between scholarship that counts (i.e., published in A journals) and scholarship that does not count (i.e., published anywhere else) (Aguinis, Shapiro, Antonacopoulou, & Cummings, 2014). This phenomenon has daunting consequences for management researchers, the scientific validity and usefulness of the knowledge they produce, and the sustainability of business schools.

THE PRESENT ARTICLE

Our focus is on the practice of counting A-journal publications as the new bottom line for valuing academic research in the management field. In the following sections, we draw attention to this practice and its attendant simplification of “an A is an A,” and call for collective action and policies to address its negative consequences.

The remainder of our article is organized as follows. First, we describe the use of A-journal lists in the management field. Second, we address reasons why the “an A is an A” phenomenon has taken hold by focusing on two primary drivers: performance management systems and research accountability. Third, we provide a discussion and critique of the effects of A-journal counting practices. On the positive side, there are administrative and perceived-equity benefits of replacing subjective measures of research value with a common, verifiable, and objective measure that can be compared across researchers and academic disciplines (Kula, 1986). Disconcertingly, however, there are mounting concerns about unintended negative effects of using A-journal lists to assess research value. Among these deleterious outcomes are questionable research practices; narrowing of research topics, theories, and

methods; and lessening of researcher care and intrinsic motivation for doing research, to name but a few (Davis, 2015; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Schwarz, Cummings, & Cummings, 2017). Finally, we offer recommendations and policy implications of how the management field might address these negative effects while preserving the positive outcomes in the future.

THE USE OF A-JOURNAL LISTS IN THE MANAGEMENT FIELD

Management scholars have typically addressed the use of A-journal lists informally among themselves, in the literature addressing broader assessments of the field (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Tsui, 2013), and directly in professional presentations and publications devoted to the subject (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Macdonald & Kam, 2007). Despite considerable literature on A-journal lists, we lack systematic studies assessing the extent of their use and the attendant effects on management scholars. Thus, our appraisal about whether the use of A-journal lists is excessive in the management field relies on the current literature, regular reports by journal editors at editorial board meetings aimed at providing evidence that their journals should be included on the A-list, informal conversations with colleagues, prevalent institutional practices at research-driven universities, and our own firsthand experience in leadership roles at several universities as well as professional organizations such as the Academy of Management. As additional evidence, consider the numerous sessions offered at Academy of Management annual meetings that address how to improve the odds of publication in an A journal, with titles such as "Publishing in Top-Tier U.S. Journals for Non-U.S. Scholars." We encourage readers to take a moment to reflect and to judge for themselves whether the excessive use of A-journal lists rings true to their own perceptions and experiences in the management field.

Our own experience suggests that A-journal counting has become routine and has taken on some of the trappings of a sports competition. For instance, publishing in an A journal is often referred to as getting a "hit," to use a baseball analogy, or a "goal," to use a soccer (football outside the United States) one. As experienced by Harley (2019, p. 294) after attending academic management conferences, "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." As an example, a recent job posting in management states clearly what counts for a win on the job market: "Applicants for this position must have a Ph.D. in a related discipline and a strong record/potential for publication in the A journals in Management with an emphasis on the *Academy of Management Journal*."¹

Many other academic disciplines have apparently reached a similar point (Abbott et al., 2010; Carpenter, Cone, & Sarli, 2014). Consistent with the principles of tournament theory (Connelly, Tihanyi, Crook, & Gangloff, 2014), faculty compete against each other for the finite number of pages available in the few A journals. Just as individual faculty within a department are competing with each other, departments within a college are also engaged in competition. At an even higher level, different business schools are also occupied in cutthroat competition, as are the universities that house them. These "victories" are increasingly crucial to academic rewards, such as intellectual status, job placement, tenure and promotion, salary, and research funds (Aguinis et al., 2014; Butler, Delaney, & Spoelstra, 2017; Honig et al., 2018; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2018). In an eloquent summary statement, Honig et al. (2018, p. 413) argued that "today's challenge to the integrity of management scholarship does not come from external demands for ideological conformity, rather from escalating competition for publication space in leading journals that is changing the internal dynamics of our community."

Together, all of this suggests that A-journal counting practices are sufficiently prevalent and troublesome in the management field to warrant analyzing their causes and effects and exploring possible solutions to their unintended negative outcomes. We recognize the instrumental value of A-journal counting in assessing research value and in producing institutional and researcher hierarchies in academe. After all, research institutions' rankings and prestige are determined at least to some extent by their members' A-journal publications (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Trieschmann, Dennis, Northcraft, & Niemi, 2000). And rankings are becoming the bottom line for many business schools (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008; Ryazanova et al., 2017). Also, for many universities and schools that are trying to encourage more and higher-quality research, establishing lists of journals that should be targeted, albeit

¹ HR_DIVNET, listserv of the Academy of Management Human Resources Division, November 8, 2018.

far from perfect, may be beneficial compared to having no target at all. However, our concern is that using this singular measure in the context of a results-only, bottom-line approach reduces prized scholarship to a simple count of number of A's. Furthermore, measuring research value exclusively by counting A-journal publications can perilously neglect how management researchers cope with A-journal competition and progressively cultivate scholarship while remaining true to the meaning and value of their intellectual pursuit.

REASONS FOR THE USE OF A-JOURNAL LISTS IN THE MANAGEMENT FIELD

Explanations for the rise of A-journal counting practices include larger cultural, political, and economic forces shaping higher education across the globe, particularly universities' institutional arrangements for acquiring and allocating resources and controlling and rewarding performance (Edwards & Roy, 2017; Lynch, 2014; Schrecker, 2010; ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Because these institutional practices can differentially affect the use and outcomes of A-journal counting across academic units and disciplines, recent research has investigated patterns of publications and their impact across settings and management subfields (Aguinis, Suarez-González, Lannelongue, & Joo, 2012). Such context-specific understanding is essential to develop appropriate solutions for the negative effects of A-journal counting on a discipline's research practices, knowledge base, and member motivations and careers.

Our analysis focuses on two powerful mechanisms that drive the "an A is an A" phenomenon: performance management systems and research accountability. These mechanisms derive from the business schools that house and support most management researchers, and their increasing need to measure the value of research products (Connelly & Gallagher, 2010; De Rond & Miller, 2005; Hogler & Gross, 2009; Moschieri & Santalo, 2018; O'Brien, Drnevich, Crook, & Armstrong, 2010; Vermeir, 2013).

Performance Management Systems

Business schools, like many organizations, struggle with the need for performance management systems that distribute rewards in a systemic, standardized, and fair manner while not relying heavily on self-reported performance measures

(Aguinis, 2019; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; DeNisi & Smith, 2014). Consequently, journal lists have gradually become the arbiter for determining the value of management research. As Gomez-Mejia and Balkin (1992) documented, the use of journal ranking lists to evaluate researcher productivity and quality of research began as an attempt by university administrators overseeing diverse departments to create a common measure of the value of research performance across those units. By instituting a journal ranking system, administrators sought to replace subjective evaluations of research quality with "common, intersubjective, verifiable standards, independent of human individuality" (Kula, 1986, p. 120).

Because management researchers have considerable freedom in defining their research agenda and how to pursue it, many business schools and their functional departments developed their own lists of A journals as a proxy for evaluating the quality of research output (Van Fleet et al., 2000). These A-journal lists enabled business schools and departments to establish "quanta," that is, a basis for measurement (Power, 2004) that was intended to be equitable and provide performance-measurement guidelines for administrators (Van Fleet et al., 2000). These lists were intended to supplement, not replace, the more traditional qualitative assessment of research based on internal and external peer review of the research itself. Like many other quanta, however, journal ranking lists, which were initially a loosely structured framework to aid administrators, have become reified and are now a taken-for-granted measure of the value of management research within the academic community (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Nkomo, 2009).

As we mentioned earlier, this phenomenon is not restricted to the management field. The compilation and analysis of journal ranking lists is now ubiquitous in many academic disciplines (e.g., Pontille & Torny, 2010; Singleton, 1976) and other business fields, including marketing (Tadajewski, 2016), finance (Guo, Wang, Qiao, & Liu, 2016), accounting (Deegan, 2016), and international business (Tüselmann, Sinkovics, & Pishchulov, 2016). Interestingly, crystallization around the use of journal lists to gauge the value of management research has occurred despite growing evidence that so-called "A journals" are not necessarily better at publishing insightful and influential articles than non-A journals or other sources of academic contribution such as books or chapters in edited volumes (Pfeffer, 2007; Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007; Starbuck, 2005; Wang, Veugelers, & Stephan, 2016). Moreover, a

recent bibliometric study of more than 85,000 papers published in 168 management and business journals found that top-rated journals strongly favor empirical studies that use quantitative methods applied to large datasets (Vogel, Hattke, & Petersen, 2017). Thus, counting publications in A journals means that “data that cannot be readily quantified are marginalized and rendered invisible, and proxy measures end up representing the thing itself” (Power, 2004, p. 775), thereby contributing to the new bottom line for valuing academic research.

Research Accountability

In addition to performance management systems, a second mechanism contributing to the “an A is an A” phenomenon is the growing pressure on business schools to be accountable for the costs and benefits of their research. The issue of accountability is relevant not only to the field of management but also across many other fields in both the humanities and sciences (Lorenz, 2012; Schrecker, 2010).

Beginning in the late 1950s, business schools began the long, arduous transition from vocational- or practitioner-oriented trade schools to research-focused institutions (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Gordon & Howell, 1959; McLaren, 2019). Fueled by the demand for more professionally educated managers as well as stinging rebukes of the quality of the research and teaching of their faculty, business schools adopted the scholarly paradigm of the social sciences as their path to legitimacy (Bailey & Ford, 1996; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). And this approach entailed defining and measuring the value or quality of their research production (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005).

The need to quantify the value of research has become even more pressing today given the growing competitive pressures business schools face because of less government funding, greater emphasis on rankings, mounting faculty shortage, and universities’ entrenched research values (Cummings, 2011). The dominance of the new bottom line for valuing academic research then is an inevitable outcome of this need to measure the value of scholarly knowledge and to link it to financial outcomes (Hogler & Gross, 2009; O’Brien et al., 2010; Radder, 2010). The practice of measuring and rewarding A-journal publications is starkly visible as business schools use this metric to implement pay-for-article compensation systems (Honig et al., 2018; Shao & Shen, 2011), provide faculty with summer financial support (e.g., from one-ninth to three-ninths of

additional salary at many U.S. universities), reduce teaching loads, and determine faculty base salary (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). By enabling the measurement of what was once the abstract concept of desirable research productivity, business schools can use A-journal hit counts to determine whether the price they pay (in terms of faculty salary and research funding) is commensurate with the value of the research output they receive, and then share this information with external stakeholders including current and potential students, donors, alumni, and funding agencies.

In addition to being used to make comparisons among individual researchers, journal lists can also be used to compare departments or specific research domains across universities (e.g., Trieschmann et al., 2000). For example, business school deans can compute the total number of A-journal articles published by their schools’ organizational behavior (OB) faculty and compare that to the total number of A-journal publications by OB faculty in peer, competing, and aspiring institutions. This information can be useful for accreditation, fundraising, and other purposes (e.g., Ryazanova et al., 2017).

In sum, the new bottom line to measure the value of research follows naturally from the practices used by business schools and their university domiciles to attempt to make the process of evaluating research more standardized, transparent, and fair. It is also the consequence of increasing pressures on business schools and universities to become more accountable and to provide evidence regarding the costs and benefits of the research they produce.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEW BOTTOM LINE FOR VALUING ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The new bottom line for valuing academic research based on the “an A is an A” dictum has a significant impact, both positive and negative, on researchers, the knowledge they produce, and the business schools that employ them. We discuss these consequences next.

Positive Consequences

The ostensible appeal of using A-journal counting to measure research value is inherent in its features. It is fast and easy to use and defend; enables evaluators to readily compare scholars’ research performance to one another and to standard benchmarks; and provides a straightforward, relatively conflict-free

approach for making decisions about whom to hire, promote, and reward. In fact, it speeds up the process of conducting faculty performance evaluations because the role of department chairs and other administrators responsible for this task is greatly limited to simply counting the number of A's.

Our own experience with A-journal counting underscores its ready attraction for assessing research value, especially when the assessment task is voluminous or involves comparisons among scholars. For example, when faced with a plethora of candidates for a beginning faculty position, a first cut may include a quick scan of CVs and elimination of those candidates without an A-journal publication. For those remaining, the higher the number of A-journal articles, the higher the candidate is likely to be placed on the campus visit list. Similarly, for senior positions, experienced candidates are unlikely to be considered unless they have a strong if not stellar record of A-journal publications, usually averaging one or more a year since starting their academic careers. At the doctoral level, even though students may be near completion of their dissertations, they may be advised to stay another year to get A-journal publications, or at least revise and resubmits, on their CVs.

Or consider the standard cohort analysis used in faculty promotion assessments. It includes information about the research performance of faculty who have recently been promoted to the rank in question at comparable schools. The number of A-journal publications, other journal articles, and total citations at the time of promotion for each faculty member are typically reported in a table along with the mean and median number of publications and citations for the cohort. Lengthy and in-depth discussion is generally reserved for promotion candidates whose research record is considered promising yet questionable, generally slightly below the cohort's A-publication means/medians. For those candidates falling significantly below or above the cohort measures, decisions to deny or recommend promotion can be relatively short and perfunctory.

So one of the most important seemingly positive outcomes of A-journal counting is the development of clear standards for judging the value of research independent of personal opinions (Kula, 1986). Like the use of other types of rankings (e.g., Rindova, Martins, Srinivas, & Chandler, 2018), the use of journal ranking lists as the arbiter of research quality enables business schools to avoid having to translate subjective opinions about the quality of research into quantifiable ratings (Van Fleet et al., 2000). Adopting this process increases the transparency of schools'

performance management systems as well as the actual and perceived fairness of the procedures used to make decisions about the allocation of rewards, key factors in ensuring perceptions of trust and organizational justice (Colquitt et al., 2013). Consistent with our previous discussion of the tournament model, as in sports, faculty know the "rules of the game" even before the game starts. As long as the rules are followed, even the losers accept the inevitability that the winners will walk away with the trophy and the losers will get nothing. Sometimes the difference between victory and defeat is a technicality, but everyone is fine with it, as illustrated by these quotes from promotion and tenure meetings we have attended: "If she had received that acceptance a week earlier she could have gotten tenure, but points scored after the buzzer do not count"; "He was a few inches short and now has to punt."

Another positive consequence is that journal ranking lists also help management faculty effectively counter biased criticism of their research by scholars in other fields that may adversely affect reward allocations. For example, because of standards based on a certain number of A's, a management department can provide clear and compelling evidence that a faculty member should be granted tenure, be promoted, receive an endowed chair, or attain other scholarly rewards. When such a standard is present, it is more difficult for evaluation committees, including members outside of management (e.g., finance, accounting), to discount the research produced by a management researcher because it uses theories, samples, and measures that may seem inappropriate from the perspective of other fields. Similarly, junior faculty members may be protected from biased decisions on the part of their own department chairs (and other administrators), who in many cases are senior faculty members who are no longer active researchers and no longer have the necessary skills to evaluate the rigor, quality, and relevance of any given study.

The use of A-journal lists also provides clear objectives and guidelines for training doctoral students and helping junior scholars establish and manage their careers (Greenberg, 2006; Mitchell, 2007). Because formulating clearly delineated goals can enhance performance (Locke & Latham, 2002), knowing the kind of research performance that is valued enables schools to train future scholars in the knowledge and skills needed to compete for jobs and to obtain valued rewards such as tenure and promotions.

Delineating the value of A-journal publications can also serve as a self-selection mechanism.

Specifically, doctoral students and faculty who do not wish to compete under a performance management system based on a particular journal list can purposefully opt out of applying to or working for a particular business school. Instead, they can pursue opportunities in schools that consider more than the number of A-journal publications to allocate rewards (Mitchell, 2007; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2007).

Finally, careful examination of A journals can provide information and exemplars about the type of theorizing, methodology, and reporting required to publish successfully in them (Ashkanasy, 2010; Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006; Bergh, 2006; Kilduff, 2007). This signaling function is inherent in the popularity of how-tos that often appear in A journals (e.g., the *Academy of Management Journal* series titled "Publishing in *AMJ*"). By making clear the expectations regarding what constitutes acceptable research rigor, journal lists can enhance the quality of research that is published, thereby benefiting the management field.

Negative Consequences

Much of the writing and conversation about the application of A-journal lists to assess the value of management research is critical of this practice and suggests that its use is rising along with negative effects on the field's research methods, knowledge generation, and social dynamics. Critics have bemoaned journal list fetishism (Cluley, 2014; Hussain, 2015; Willmott, 2011), warned of the seductive power of journal lists (Nkomo, 2009), complained about the "escalating competition for publication space in leading journals that is changing the dynamics of our community" (Honig et al., 2018, p. 413), and concluded that "the pressure to publish in only A journals affects what scholars write, what scholars cite in their papers, what outlets scholars seek for their papers, what scholars teach, what service scholars provide, and what types of research studies scholars design" (Shapiro, 2017, p. 170).

The lure of measuring research value by the number of A-journal articles raises several worrisome questions. Do evaluation committees allocate sufficient time to discuss how each publication was achieved, such as how the study was conceived and conducted and how it fits within a broader research stream and program? Do they evaluate how it is likely to change the intellectual conversation and improve organizational practices? Do they consider the effect these A-journal designations and distinctions have

on academics' careers and the knowledge they create? In short, an A-journal article may often be celebrated as a victory with relatively little conversation about the study's content, the quality of its methodology and data, and the implications of its findings for theory and practice (Aguinis et al., 2012; Davis, 2015; George, 2014; Ghoshal, 2005).

Arguably, one of the most pernicious outcomes of the "an A is an A" phenomenon is the rampant increase in the prevalence of questionable research practices (QRPs) (Aguinis, Banks, Rogelberg, & Cascio, in press; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Honig et al., 2018; Karabag & Berggren, 2016). QRPs are "design, analytic, or reporting practices that have been questioned because of the potential for the practice to be employed with the purpose of presenting biased evidence in favor of an assertion" (Banks et al., 2016, p. 3).

For example, consider QRPs regarding outliers—data points that lie far from the rest of a distribution of scores (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2013; Aguinis, Hill, & Bailey, in press). Aguinis et al. (2013) documented that researchers have many degrees of freedom in how they define, identify, and handle outliers, and that such freedom has a direct impact on substantive conclusions about the presence, absence, direction, and size of effects. Given the new bottom line for valuing academic research, researchers may use those degrees of freedom to make decisions that support a favored hypothesis or result in statistically significant and larger effects, with the goal of securing an A-journal publication. As documented based on a review of more than 230 published articles, many authors make generic statements such as "outliers were eliminated from the sample" without offering details on how and why they made such a decision (Aguinis et al., 2013).

Similar QRPs have been observed in the use (and misuse) of control variables, selective reporting of hypothesis tests, HARKing (i.e., hypothesizing after results are known), data transformations, and *p*-hacking (i.e., data "snooping" until a pattern is "discovered" and not revealing this process but reporting only the statistically significant finding) (Aguinis, Cascio, & Ramani, 2017; Aguinis, Hill et al., in press; Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018; Bedeian, Taylor, & Miller, 2010; Bergh, Sharp, Aguinis, & Li, 2017; Bettis, 2012; Bettis, Ethiraj, Gambardella, Helfat, & Mitchell, 2016; Murphy & Aguinis, 2019; Schwab & Starbuck, 2017). Although engaging in these cardinal sins and various misdemeanors (Bedeian et al., 2010) may improve the chances of publishing in an A journal, it creates

challenges for the trustworthiness and credibility of management research because the lack of transparency and openness regarding these choices precludes reproducing and replicating a study's findings (e.g., Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Bakker, van Dijk, & Wicherts, 2012; Bergh et al., 2017; Bettis et al., 2016).

Setting challenging but possibly attainable goals, such as five A's in six years to attain a positive tenure decision, can motivate people to devote more effort to achieving them (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, simply prescribing stretch goals can have adverse unintended consequences (Kleingeld, van Mierlo, & Arends, 2011; Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, & Bazerman, 2009; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014). Adequate consideration must also be given to the processes, behaviors, and mechanisms that produce those results (Sitkin, See, Miller, Lawless, & Carton, 2011). Emphasizing outcomes (i.e., publications in A journals) while ignoring the behaviors and processes that lead to those results (e.g., *p*-hacking, HARKing, and selective reporting of results) can merely motivate people to do whatever it takes to reach the desired goal (Aguinis, 2019; Edwards & Roy, 2017; Ordóñez et al., 2009). Consequently, making salient rewards such as tenure and promotion contingent almost exclusively on publishing in A journals (Ashkanasy, 2010; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992) can incentivize researchers to produce as many A-journal articles as possible, without necessarily considering whether research results are reproducible, advance the broader conversation in the field, or have meaningful practical implications (Bakker et al., 2012; Bedeian et al., 2010; Tsui, 2013).

In addition, the imperative to produce as many A's as possible can lead to an excessive division of labor and the proliferation of multiauthor articles (Acedo, Barroso, Casanueva, & Galán, 2006; Kozlowski, Chen, & Salas, 2017). Van Fleet and Bedeian (2016, p. 351) noted that this rise in coauthorship is due in part to "extreme publication pressure" and "the advent of publication communes in which individuals exchange sham co-authorships to pad their résumés." Given the low acceptance rates at A journals (Ashkanasy, 2010), researchers increasingly choose to hedge their bets by delegating responsibility for different aspects of an article to different coauthors (Plume & van Wiejen, 2014) and establishing reciprocal systems with other authors where they agree to include each other on projects to increase their chances of securing the number of wins (i.e., A's) needed to claim their reward (Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2003).

Another adverse consequence of the excessive focus on A-journal publications is that it privileges

the scientific impact of management research over its practical implications. The central criterion for publication in A journals is contribution to theory (Hambrick, 2007). Although this does not necessarily negate the practical application of this research, it is of secondary importance and receives passing attention, if any, in A-journal articles (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010). Over time, the rewards that accrue from A-journal publication reinforce this emphasis of theory over practice and contribute to the growing trend in the management field of doing and publishing research primarily for other researchers, not for the broader practice community (Aguinis, Ramani, Alabduljader, Bailey, & Lee, 2019; Hambrick, 1994; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016). This singular attention to the researcher audience may be natural for academic disciplines such as physics and chemistry, which seek to create basic knowledge for the discipline. However, it is more questionable for management researchers in professional business schools, where research is intended to contribute *both* to the field's knowledge base and to the practice of the management profession (Aguinis et al., 2019; Pettigrew, 2011; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2018). As Schwab and Starbuck (2017, p. 138) noted, "Scientific progress hinges on motivating researchers not just to publish articles, but also to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge across studies with the ultimate goal of positive impact on management practice." As pointed out by Cummings (2011, p. 331), "Business schools are the professional home of most management researchers. Consequently, they can have an enormous effect on the conduct and output of faculty research and, ultimately, on whether it is useful for theory and practice."

The excessive pressure to publish in A journals can also inadvertently narrow the institutional base supporting management research, which can result in less variety in the field's knowledge. This can be seen in the growing competition among business schools for faculty publishing in A journals (Leonhardt, 1996; Shin & Kehm, 2012). In today's increasingly competitive publishing environment where the clear majority of business school faculty struggle to publish an A-journal article (Certo et al., 2010), many schools have taken a leaf out of the sports playbook and begun recruiting stars, those select few scholars who publish far above the norm in A journals. While this is certainly beneficial for those highly productive individuals and their employers and results in cumulative advantage for them such that the "rich get richer" (Aguinis, O'Boyle, Gonzalez-Mulé, & Joo, 2016), it can limit the production of high-quality research to those

few researchers and schools with the talent and resources to compete in this veritable arms race.

In the humanities, for example, a similar arms race has resulted in just over half of the articles published in the four top journals over a 45-year period being authored by scholars employed at the top 10 university humanities programs (Piper & Wellmon, 2017). Thus, if the management field follows a similar pattern, it could gradually become a research oligarchy with a select few A-journal scholars and their respective employers determining the topics, theories, and methods that are considered high quality (i.e., worthy of A-journal publication). Over time, this can diminish the magnitude and rate of variety in management research needed for the field's knowledge to grow and develop.

Emphasis on A-journal publication can also reduce the heterogeneity and innovation in management research through the preferred methodological approaches used to publish in these journals. Much of their content is based on research using hypothetico-deductive methods and state-of-the-art analytical techniques aimed at precision, control, and testability of existing theory (Bedeian, 1989, 2004; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Cortina, Aguinis, & DeShon, 2017; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Swedberg, 2012; Vogel et al., 2017). These research methods are highly relevant to the exploitation of existing management knowledge—testing, refining, and extending it. They are less suited to the exploration of management knowledge, which seeks to discover novel phenomena and invent new theory (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017; March 1991). Here, inductive and abductive forms of inquiry are more pertinent (Schwab & Starbuck, 2017). Yet despite persistent and rising calls for more innovative and varied management research (e.g., Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2001; Shapiro, 2017; Tsui, 2013; Weick, 1989), deductive research methods continue to dominate the management field. They are part of a self-reinforcing cycle in which deductive research increases the likelihood of A-journal publication, which in turn leads to more deductive research and so on.

From a researcher's perspective, A-journal lists can lead to decreased emphasis on what researchers care about in doing management research (Schwarz et al., 2017). By focusing exclusively on research output in A journals, the locus of control for management research shifts from the researcher to the external market, thereby turning an intrinsically driven research process into one that is extrinsically motivated and controlled. As noted by Marcuse (1941), this extrinsic shift attenuates producers'

individuality and uniqueness of contribution, which for management researchers can reduce the variety and novelty of their knowledge products. Thus, defining performance in terms of A's can decrease researcher care by forcing scholars to weigh the importance of their interests against the interests of the gatekeepers (i.e., editors and board members) of these A journals, often resulting in a forced choice between research they truly care about and research that will be accepted in such journals. The use of a narrow and psychometrically deficient definition and measure of research performance (Aguinis et al., 2012, 2014, 2019)—that is, counting A's—further exacerbates the problem. By excluding from consideration other viable and valuable outlets for academic research, such as textbooks, book chapters in edited volumes, and articles in specialty journals, the A-journal performance measure may curtail intrinsic motivation among researchers.

Finally, the negative consequences of A-journal counting should be considered within the context of the fallible nature of the processes involved in the creation of journal lists. It is often the case that the categorization of a journal as A or not leaves many questions unanswered even if there is a seemingly straightforward goal to classify journals exclusively based on their impact within the academic community (Cone, 2012; Glänzel & Moed, 2002). Recall that a journal's impact factor is calculated as the number of citations received in that year of articles published in that journal during the two preceding years, divided by the total number of articles published in that journal during the two preceding years. So the most recent Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson Reuters) impact factor values, which were released in 2019, are the average citations in 2018 to articles published in 2016 and 2017.

Interestingly, *Academy of Management Annals* is ranked as the journal with the highest impact factor (12.29) in the management category (and it was also ranked #1 in 2018). *Organization Science* is ranked #57 and has an impact factor of 3.26, considerably lower than *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* (7.18), *Organizational Research Methods* (6.55), *Leadership Quarterly* (5.63), *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (3.96), *Academy of Management Perspectives* (3.86), and *Human Resource Management Review* (3.63), which are not usually considered A journals. Clearly, many unknown factors, which are sources of measurement error and bias, play an important role in whether a journal is classified as an A or not. Because many of these factors are obviously idiosyncratic (e.g., the arbitrary total number of A journals

imposed by the dean's office, whether local faculty publish regularly in a particular journal), the compilation of journal lists is often a contentious issue involving conflict within and between departments.

Summary

Table 1 includes a summary of positive and negative consequences of the use of A-journal counting practices for measuring the value of management research. Although journal lists may initially have been useful in focusing business schools and researchers on improving research output and focusing their research efforts, at present their negative consequences outweigh their positive effects. Like financial decisions in corporations, management researchers and the business schools that employ them must show an adequate return on investment to continue to be viable. This bottom-line and auditing mentality is at odds with the ethos of research that seeks to uncover important truths

that have scholarly and practical significance (Walsh, 2011). Simply counting A-journal articles and using this as the bottom line for valuing academic research places the integrity of our research and our identity as researchers in conflict with the demands of exclusively results-oriented performance management systems (Edwards & Roy, 2017).

Moreover, the new bottom line for valuing academic research means that research can become monetized: Each A-journal publication has a tangible monetary value (Connelly & Gallagher, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2010; Stephan, 1991; Walstad, 2002). The consequences of this conflict can have dire implications for the scientific validity and usefulness of our research and our careers as academics because, given that A-journal publications are readily monetizable, many faculty choose to not invest in activities that are nonmonetizable (e.g., mentoring a struggling doctoral student or junior faculty member) or not portable (e.g., institution building).

TABLE 1
Summary of Positive and Negative Consequences of the New Bottom Line for Valuing Academic Research: "An A Is an A"

Positive consequences
1. Helps develop clear standards for judging the value of research and avoids having to translate subjective opinions about the quality of research into quantifiable ratings
2. Increases the transparency of schools' performance management systems as well as the actual and perceived fairness of the procedures used to make decisions about the allocation of rewards
3. Helps management faculty effectively counter biased criticism of research by scholars in other fields that may adversely affect reward allocations
4. Protects junior faculty members from biased decisions on the part of their own department chairs (and other administrators), who in many cases are senior faculty members who are no longer research active and no longer have the necessary skills to evaluate the quality, rigor, and relevance of any given study
5. Provides clear objectives and guidelines for training doctoral students and helping junior scholars establish and manage their careers
6. Can serve as a self-selection mechanism for doctoral students and faculty
7. Offers information and exemplars about the type of theorizing, methodology, and reporting that is required to publish in A-journals
Negative consequences
1. Produces generalized negative effects on the field's research methods, knowledge generation, and social dynamics
2. Increases the prevalence of questionable research practices (e.g., use and misuse of control variables, selective reporting of hypothesis tests, hypothesizing after results are known [HARKing], data transformations)
3. Incentivizes researchers to produce as many A-journal articles as possible without necessarily considering whether results are reproducible and advance the broader conversation in the field, or have meaningful practical implications
4. Results in excessive division of labor and the proliferation of multiauthor articles, which can lead to reciprocal systems of sham authorship and publication credit
5. Contributes to the growing trend of doing and publishing research primarily for other researchers, not for other stakeholders—including the broader practice community
6. Narrows the institutional base supporting management research, which can result in less variety in the field's knowledge
7. Reduces heterogeneity and innovation in management research through preferred methodological approaches less suited to the exploration of management knowledge that seeks to discover novel phenomena and invent new theory
8. Decreases emphasis on what researchers care about in doing management research because it moves the locus of control for management research from the researcher to the external market, thereby turning an intrinsically driven research process into one that is extrinsically motivated and controlled
9. Motivates many faculty to invest in activities that are readily monetizable (i.e., A-journal publications) rather than activities that are nonmonetizable (e.g., mentoring a struggling doctoral student or junior faculty member) or not portable (e.g., institution building).

MAXIMIZING POSITIVE AND MINIMIZING NEGATIVE RESULTS OF THE NEW BOTTOM LINE FOR VALUING ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Because the use of A-journal publications as a measure of research quality has certain benefits, we should build on them while seeking ways to ameliorate negative effects. Journal lists are a reasonable initial tool to define research performance standards when none or very few exist. As mentioned earlier, they supplement purely subjective opinions of research quality with a clear measure that is verifiable. But to maximize the positive impact of journal lists, they need to be part of a more comprehensive performance management system that identifies, measures, and develops researchers' performance (Aguinis, 2019; Cummings, 2011; DeNisi & Smith, 2014).

The current situation in business schools is not sustainable, yet we do not realistically see a radical change occurring in the near future. So we offer recommendations for creating policies and a system that nudges management researchers beyond an obsession with A journals and toward producing knowledge that has an impact on a broader set of stakeholders than the research community, more openly reports methodological and analytical choices than when engaging in QRPs, and is more innovative and heterogeneous than exploitation of existing knowledge. Our recommendations involve concrete interventions and policies that are not just pious sentiments that are unlikely to be translated into action. Also, some of them are forward looking in that their full potential is likely to be realized once advancements in new ways of collecting and analyzing data, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and computer-adaptive text analysis, become more common and available (Balducci & Marinova, 2018; Johnson, Bauer, & Niederman, in press; McKenny, Aguinis, Short, & Anglin, 2018). Nevertheless, they point in the direction of addressing thorny and critical issues in the field of management and business schools in general. Also, as noted by Tracey (2018, p. 200), changing "the 'A-hit' mentality and reward system that currently pervades higher education" requires "a little enlightened leadership in the dean's office." We first suggest how to design performance management systems and measure research performance and then how to build research skills.

Performance Management System Design

Ideally, business schools' performance management systems should derive from strategic choices about how to compete, relate to key stakeholders,

and acquire and deploy resources. Explicit and careful attention to management research in making those decisions can clarify the strategic role that research plays in how business schools function and compete. It can identify the value that key stakeholders place on research and determine how those values should be weighted in assessing and rewarding performance.

As we argued, excessive attention to A-journal publications narrows the value of management research to contributions to the research community. Although this may be a strategic choice, business schools can benefit from considering the research values of a broader set of stakeholders, at least during strategic planning or when performance management systems are created or redesigned. Thus, in addition to researchers, the value of management research to corporations and government, students, the media, and others could be assessed (Aguinis et al., 2014). This can reveal criteria for assessing research value that go beyond traditional contribution-to-theory standards to address the degree to which research is actionable, pedagogically useful, or broadly interesting (Aguinis et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016; Shapiro, 2017; Shapiro & Kirkman, 2018). Business schools could then make informed decisions about how to weigh the strategic importance of these stakeholder research values and ensure that they are measured and rewarded accordingly.

For example, schools that strategically emphasize education and teaching are likely to weigh the pedagogical contributions of their research products highly; others that choose to compete as elite research institutions would likely place a high value on the scientific contributions of their research products, and those that seek to compete with a more balanced strategy might weigh educational and scientific research contributions equally. Also, a business school may wish to look for a balanced portfolio of publication activities while considering someone for promotion or tenure. For example, a school can set standards that require a faculty member to produce a portfolio of conceptual, empirical, and practitioner articles to be promoted. In this case, the insistence on at least one publication targeting a practitioner audience can motivate faculty to think of the practical relevance of their research.

Research Performance Measures

Strategic choices about the value of management research should guide the measures that business

schools use to account for research performance. From a measurement perspective, research value, such as scientific contribution or pedagogical relevance, is considered an underlying construct that affects an observable indicator, such as A-journal publications or textbook publishing. Because observable indicators are imperfect measures of underlying constructs, multiple indicators can provide a more accurate account of research quality than single indicators (Sijtsma, 2012). Thus, for example, using only A-journal publications to assess the scientific contribution of management research is likely to provide an incomplete (i.e., psychometrically deficient) measure of this research quality, which can result in reward and resource-allocation practices that are only partially valid (Aguinis et al., 2014).

Additional measures of scientific contribution might include citation counts in journal articles as well as in textbooks (Aguinis et al., 2019; Aguinis, Ramani et al., 2017), best article awards, and inclusion of a researcher's articles on doctoral seminar reading lists, to name a few. Specifically, regarding citation analysis, an informative measure can be the way a publication is cited as well as the meaning of the citation—in addition to just counting citations. Kacmar and Whitfield (2000) and Golden-Biddle, Locke, and Reay (2006) illustrated that more in-depth qualitative analysis of the meaning of and way in which a citation source is discussed offers useful information about the relative impact of previously published work.

The generalized use of citation tools such as the freely available Google Scholar was unimaginable just a few years ago. Similarly, the increasing availability of technological advancements in the way data collection and analysis can be automated (e.g., Johnson et al., in press; Landers, Brusso, Cavanaugh, & Collmus, 2016) will allow us to implement some of these ways of measuring the meaning of a citation. In addition, multiple indicators of research's practical relevance are already readily available and include publications in practitioner-oriented and bridging journals, media coverage, number of followers on social media, citations in textbooks and popular business books, and the like.

Assessing the value of management research can be refined by measuring research quality as a continuous rather than a dichotomous "count" versus "does not count" variable. A promising step in creating continuous measures of research quality that still uses journal lists is the Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide

(Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2018). It ranks business and management journals in various subject areas into five levels of quality. The Guide uses a variety of information sources to judge journal quality, including standard impact factor and citation metrics, input from a scientific committee composed of subject-area experts who draw on feedback from their respective academic communities, and Guide editors and methodologists. Journals are ranked based on citation impact, submission and acceptance rates, age of journal, the use of accepted refereeing standards and conventions, and judgments of research originality and methodology.

Clearly, no journal list, including this one, is without criticism (Mingers & Willmott, 2013). But the guide's five levels of journal quality provide a wider range and a more refined measure of research quality than the traditional dichotomous categorization of A-journal or not. They enable business schools to make finer distinctions about the quality of research and to reward faculty accordingly. Schools can choose how to weight the categories for different performance and resource purposes. For annual salary merit, for example, a research-oriented school might use only the top three categories to assess research quality and weight them 60%, 30%, and 10%, respectively. For tenure purposes, it might use only the two highest categories and weight them 75% and 25%. A predominantly teaching school might consider scholarship published in any of the journal categories for both merit and tenure purposes, and supplement these with assessments of pedagogical contributions such as textbooks, teaching cases, book chapters, and practitioner-oriented white papers.

Nondichotomous measures of research quality at the level of the individual study or journal article offer an even more direct assessment of research quality than using journal lists as a value proxy. The standard use of citation counts and their variants to assess an article's scientific contribution provides a continuous measure of its usefulness to scholars. This could be supplemented with measures of specific features of a study that influence scientific quality, such as theoretical parsimony, interestingness, methodological rigor, and analytical sophistication. Developing continuous measures of these features would likely involve expert judgments, which bring with them the challenges of choosing which features of a study are valid indicators of scientific quality, gaining agreement among those evaluating the features, and having the time and resources to do all this (Gottfredson, 1978).

A useful alternative from the healthcare field involves assessing the risks that study results are biased or causally invalid. The Cochrane Collaboration, a pioneer of evidence-based knowledge in health care, has developed lists of risk factors that can potentially lead to biased findings (Higgins & Green, 2011), and many of these factors are based on standard threats to validity familiar to management researchers (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). These lists include clear and readily assessed indicators of risk that provide a measure, from low to high, of the relative risk of bias of a study's findings. The lists could be applied or adapted to assess the risk that a management study's results are biased or do not permit strong inferences.

Indeed, evidence-based methods are receiving increased attention in the management field (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Rousseau, 2012). Analogously, continuous measures of an article's practical relevance might start with citations in practitioner and bridging journals and textbooks, and various alternative metrics (i.e., "altmetrics") such as the number of webpages on Google.com or the number of mentions on consultants' blog posts (Aguinis et al., 2019). These measures could be supplemented with indicators that an article's findings or recommendations address organizational problems and can be practically implemented. Lists of indicators of problem identification and implementation could be developed from the extensive literature on organization development and change (e.g., Cummings & Worley, 2019; Kotter, 2012).

Finally, we offer two practical recommendations that would not take much effort to implement. First, candidates being reviewed for promotions could be asked to provide evaluation committees with information about what they consider to be their three to five most important publications and why. These articles (or even book chapters) would be read and evaluated by the relevant committee members, in terms of perceived originality, quality, and actual or potential impact (De Rond & Miller, 2005). Second, the management field's major professional organization, the Academy of Management, could sign the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA), which recognizes the need to improve the ways the outputs of scientific research are evaluated. This would signal our field's commitment to improving how management research is valued and assessed; it would put us in the company of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, and the 1,863 other scientific societies,

research institutions, and academic journals and 15,540 scholars who have committed to DORA's goals and principles as of January 30, 2020.

Our recommendations thus far have addressed the design and measurement aspects of performance management: identifying and measuring the value of management research. They suggest the need for broader criteria and more refined indicators for assessing research performance than singular attention to publications in A journals. We attend now to the development part of performance management, concerned with enhancing researchers' skills and knowledge so they can be used to improve their research performance.

Research Skills Training and Development

Given the pressure to publish, rising numbers of submissions, and high rejection rates, time and the demands of the profession make it more and more difficult for many management researchers to keep research skills up to date. In addition, for neophytes in doctoral programs, learning research methods and analytical techniques can be especially demanding as many business schools, faced with rising financial strains, provide fewer doctoral seminars and outsource much of their methods training to disciplinary departments or other professional schools (Byington & Felps, 2017; Schwab & Starbuck, 2017; Wright, 2016). These problems with research-skill development can contribute to the QRPs described previously. Lacking the skills often needed to produce research for A journals, researchers may choose not to disclose dubious methodological decisions and practices to increase their chances of publication in these elite journals (Aguinis et al., 2018; Aguinis, Hill et al., in press).

A practical approach to developing those much-needed research skills is to attend to the growing number of best-practice recommendations appearing in the literature (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2013; Aguinis, Hill et al., in press). They provide clear and useful guidelines for how to address various research issues such as handling outliers, estimating cross-level interaction effects, using control variables, and dealing with nonnormal data. These best practices could be used as checklists when designing a study and making methodological and analytical decisions (Aguinis, Hill et al., in press; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). Best practices can also identify methods and analytical techniques that researchers might want to learn more about, perhaps by watching a webcast or attending short courses offered by the Consortium

for the Advancement of Research Methods and Analysis (CARMA; Madden, Madden, Rousseau, & Woehr, 2016), or by participating in one of the many methods workshops at the Academy of Management's annual meeting.

Developing skills for producing high-quality research involves learning methods and analysis techniques for doing the kind of deductive research that is currently dominant in the field of management. Yet researchers also need to develop skills to do exploratory research for creating innovative and heterogeneous management knowledge. This requires learning how to conduct inductive and abductive forms of inquiry. The former involves gathering data, analyzing it for patterns, and hypothesizing about them; the latter entails choosing the most likely explanation from a set of observations (Thagard, 1991). Daft (1983) proposed that these forms of inquiry are part of learning the craft of research. They require moving beyond the formal, technical aspects of research to appreciate the surprise, emotion, common sense, and learning by doing involved in scientific exploration and discovery.

Swedberg (2012) developed a promising approach to doctoral training in sociology built on an exploration logic. It consists of an initial exploration phase followed by a deduction phase. Students learn exploration through observing something interesting and applying rules that emphasize intuition, imagination, and abduction; they learn deduction through traditional reading, classroom activities, and doing hypothesis-testing projects. More recently, Schwab and Starbuck (2017) suggested a novel approach to developing exploration research skills. They described how questionable research practices, such as HARKing and *p*-hacking, can be transformed into useful inquiry techniques if used openly and reported honestly. For example, new hypotheses discovered during data analysis could be reported as inferences and conjectures for further study; running and reporting multiple models and statistical procedures to probe for data patterns can provide a deeper understanding of the data and the research setting.

CONCLUSION

"An A is an A" is a common mantra in the management field, signaling the high value of articles published in A journals. Although the phrase may seem a simple declaration, it represents the powerful role that A-journal publications have come to play in the management field and the new bottom line for

valuing academic research. Indeed, the emphasis on A-journal publication, while laudable in certain respects, has had serious detrimental effects on the conduct, content, and reporting of management research; the behavior of management scholars; the implication of academic value; and the success of business schools and the satisfaction of their stakeholders. This A-journal mindset has taken hold and become institutionalized over the past few decades as business schools responded to increasing pressure to measure the value of their research for performance management and accountability purposes. The realization of the dominance of this new bottom line for valuing academic research provides a foundation for moving management research beyond A-journal strictures. We hope our analysis and forward-looking recommendations and policy suggestions will spur further travel down this path.

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