

Socially Responsible Business School Research:
A Vision and an Action Plan Toward a Science in Service of the World

A. Background

Academics, deans, members of the business community as well as other business school stakeholders have broadly criticized current research practices in business schools (see article “Tsui: Reconnecting with the business world: Socially responsible scholarship, EFMD Global Focus, January 2015). The criticisms have touched upon most aspects of research production including exclusive emphasis on theory irrespective of the importance or relevance of the topic being studied, methodological rigor irrespective of the quality of the data and appropriateness of the samples, quantity of papers in specific journals with an erroneous assumption that the quality of outlet equates the quality of the paper published in it. It has been further argued that business school research suffers from systemic ideological biases, which are reflecting economic rather than social interests. Critics are also taking issue with the way researchers are trained, mentored and incentivized, and that the talents of our researchers are being misappropriated. Leading scholars have written many articles that discuss a variety of such problems (see Appendix A on pp. 7-8 for a bibliography of these works).

All these problems suggest that business school research has failed to live up to the scientific mission of producing valid and useful knowledge that can be potentially applied to improve the human condition through enlightening management practices. Investment in business school research is in the billions of dollars. A recent Wharton School study (Terwiesch & Ulrich, 2014) estimated the cost of an A-journal article to be about \$400,000, counting only the salary of the research faculty. It does not include research grants provided by government and private funding agencies. Every year, many millions are spent on research that are published but not read (no citations) or used (the names of the most well-cited scholars seldom appear on non-academic websites, see Aguinis, et al., 2012). Given such problems, it is unclear that this research investment by business schools has yielded meaningful returns to either science or to the world of practice.

While criticisms abound, concrete solution is scarce. There are some movements in a constructive direction by funding agencies, professional associations and journals (see Appendix B on page 7 for some initiatives) but it is too early to tell if these efforts will produce concrete outcomes. These are good starts, but much more are needed. This document describes a process toward the goal of changing the status quo by identifying concrete steps to bring true science back into the research function in business schools.

Research is tightly coupled with teaching responsibility of a faculty scholar. Scholars who do research on critical practical issues of our times would be connected to the business world and the world at large. They are more aware of the current issues and their teaching will be more evidence-based. Scholar-teachers who contribute practical solutions through their scientifically rigorous research could bring immediate values to their students in serving as role models of deep caring for the society and the wellbeing of all concerned. Engagement in socially responsible research will contribute to socially

responsible teaching which in turn will shape socially responsible business leaders. The focus of this current project is on the research duty of faculty scholars, recognizing the logical and desirable connection to their duty as an educator.

B. Objectives

We will propose a process to identify possible options for removing existing limitations, constraints and behavioral patterns. The process will identify (a) the biggest levers of change, (b) the specific measures and steps of change to be taken by different actors, and (c) effective ways of enabling these actors to initiate the desirable changes.

C. Vision

Our initial premise is that the status quo has forgotten or is ignoring the mission of the research function in business schools:

1. The scientific mission of business school research is to develop accurate and truthful knowledge about business and management that will enhance both the economic and social outcomes of organizations.
2. Business school research should be accountable to resource providers (e.g. funding organizations, donors, contractors as well as tax payers / society at large) that research funds are used for the purpose stated in 1 above.
3. Business schools should assess the contribution of research by using a variety of metrics that relate to the four types of scholarship proposed by Boyer (1990): discovery, application, integration and teaching. Assessing faculty research using only publications in a narrow set of ranked journals fails to accurately represent these four areas. This metric is both narrow and wrong since journal ranking is not an accurate measure of the quality of individual articles within the journal.

Our vision is that business schools will adopt research practices consistent with these general principles.

D. Process

The project will first seek to develop actionable remedies and to invite debates on these remedies by engaging all affected parties interested in having a voice and participate in changing the status quo toward a science in business schools that are consistent with scientific principles and spirit. In a second phase, we will seek to identify and undertake relevant steps to encourage critical stakeholders to engage in changing the critical parameters toward socially responsible science.

D.1 PHASE 1

Develop a “position paper” which has two parts:

- Part 1 outlines the status quo of business school research, its consequences on scholarship, science, and practice. This should be no more than 30% of the content.
- Part 2, being the main part of the paper, will outline a set of possible, tentative and potentially actionable remedies for each of the stakeholders: school leadership, journal editors, ranking agencies, granting agencies, researchers, and managers – as consumers of knowledge produced.

In the context of developing the “position paper”, we will invite supporters, sponsors, and co-initiators. We will also develop a dedicated website to inform the debate, post the positions paper, develop a blog for comments, and invite signatures in support of the project.

We envision the process to the development of this “position paper” will involve a Delphi process to identify an initial list of potential solutions. The participants of the Delphi will be scholars who have written about the various aspects of this problem (e.g., the list in Appendix A) plus additional scholars based on recommendations and referrals. This will be followed by the writing of the paper by a core working group on the selected solutions from the Delphi. This is just a tentative idea until the working group convenes to discuss potentially other viable approaches.

D.2 PHASE 2

- Identify critical actors that can change the current frameworks or conditions and existing limiting parameters.
- Develop alternative approaches and suggestions and identify the best possible way to approach the key actors so that they can put in motion the required changes.
- Implement feasible tools to approach the identified key actors (this may involve collecting signatures by the community of business & management scholars, or more broadly, the social sciences, etc.).
- Initiate, facilitate and engage in initial discussions with the key actors to enable them with critical support to make first steps of change.
- Eventually, develop a self-regulation mechanism in the scientific community to ensure that scientific efforts and outputs are judged not only by their scientific merit but also by their service to society and the world.

E. Ensuring Impact and Dissemination of Results

E.1 Potential Levers

In order to ensure the significant change we envision, we need to identify the most relevant levers for change. These may involve:

- Business school associations, some also accreditation bodies (EFMD, AACSB, AAPBS, CEEMAN, CLADEA, ABS, etc.)
- Rankings (e.g. FT Ranking, BusinessWeek, Handelsblatt, Multi URank)
- Journal publishers (e.g. Sage, Wiley, Elsevier, et al.)
- Professional associations (e.g., AoM, AEA, AAA, AFA, AMA, AOMA, EURAM, BAOM, AAOM, etc.) that publish academic journals
- PRME, GRLI, 50+20, ABIS
- Granting agencies: U.S. NSF, UK Research Council, other national research grant institutions.
- Business schools around the world

E.2 Dissemination of Results

- Free Access of “Position Paper”
- Roundtable discussion with key media people (e.g. Della Bradshaw/FT)
- Presentation at EFMD Dean & Directors Meeting 2016
- Presentation at professional association and business school association conferences (AoM, ASSA, AAPBS, Canadian Deans Conference, ABS, etc.)
- Presentation at other business school associations and accreditation bodies.

F. Project Team

F.1 Selection Principle

Project team composition should ensure broad coverage of:

- Geography: North America, Europe, South America, Asia
- Fields: Finance/accounting/economics, marketing, operations, management

F.2 Project Team Members

The project team will constitute a Committee for Socially Responsible Research (CSRR), which will comprise of the members of a working group and a group of deans from caring business schools to review proposed ideas and provide input and guidance on the project.

Potential working group members:

- Ulrich Hommel, EFMD
- Anne Tsui, Arizona State University and University of Notre Dame, Past President, Academy of Management, Past Editor, *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Management and Organization Review*
- Jim Walsh, Ross School of Business, U. of Michigan, Past President, Academy of Management, Past Editor, *Academy of Management Annals (to be confirmed)*
- Leading scholars in various disciplines supporting this cause
- Past/current Presidents of American Finance Association, American Accounting Association, American Marketing Association, American Operations Management Association, etc.

Potential deans as members:

- Katrin Muff, Dean Business School Lausanne; Project leader, 50+20
- One or more deans from North America (USA and Canada)
- One or two more deans from leading business schools in Europe
- One dean from a leading business school in China
- One dean from a leading business school in Asia, outside of China
- One or two deans from Australia/New Zealand
- One dean from South America

G. Time Line

- Working group formation: March 2015
- Delphi process completion: July 2015
- Working group meeting: August 2015
- Position paper completion: December 2015
- Website completion: September 2015
- Dissemination strategy: August 2016
- Dissemination: August 2016 to July 2018

Appendix A: Bibliography on the state of management research (file with abstract or synopsis of each article is available by emailing Anne Tsui at atsui@nd.edu)

1. Adler, N.J. and Harzing A-W. 2009. When knowledge wins: Transcending the sense and nonsense of academic rankings. *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 8(1): 72–95.
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4. Baum J.A. 2011. Free-riding on power laws: Questioning the validity of the impact factor as a measure of research quality in organization studies. *Organization*, 18(4): 449–466.
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The original research article is by Terwiesch and Ulrich and is available on this website: <http://www.ktulrich.com/uploads/6/1/7/1/6171812/terwiesch-ulrich-mooc-16jul2014.pdf>
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Appendix B: Initiatives to change the status quo

1. Research Excellence Framework. 2011. *Decisions on assessing research impact*. Retrieved from <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2011-01/>

The REF is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. It replaced the **Research Assessment Exercise** (RAE), last conducted in 2008. [Beginning 2014, REF places 25% weight on social or practical impact of the research of UK institutions.](#)

2. *San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment*. 2012. <http://www.ascb.org/dora-old/files/SFDeclarationFINAL.pdf>.

Also, <http://dmm.biologists.org/content/early/2013/05/16/dmm.012955.short>

On December 16, 2012, 155 editors and publishers of scholarly journals in a variety of disciplines, mostly in biological sciences, representing 82 organizations worldwide gathered in San Francisco to sign a declaration with specific suggestions for a new framework for assessing research contribution. They declared:

Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions. The Declaration offers specific recommendation for funding agencies, institutions, publishers, and organizations that supply metrics. Basically, they are arguing development criteria and methods that put science back into assessing research.

3. Schekman, R. 2013. How journals like *Nature*, *Cell* and *Science* are damaging science. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/09/how-journals-nature-science-cell-damage-science>

Randy Schekman is the recipient of the 2013 Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine. Recognizing that journals encourage researchers to pursue fashionable topics, distort the scientific process, and encourage shortcuts, he declared the day before he received the Nobel Prize that he will no longer submit papers to *Nature*, *Cell*, and *Science*, the three top science journals.

4. Industrial and organizational psychology and management journal Editors pledge to uphold ethics in publications, 2014. www.editorethics.uncc.edu

2011/2012 marked an important year for research and publishing ethics. The world press highlighted numerous data fraud scandals, *Science* published papers and commentaries on the use of coercive citations among journals, and journals faced criticism for engaging in tactics more focused on engorging impact factors than the advancement of science *per se*. At the same time, this period showcased public dialog on the topic of research ethics among major professional associations, and journals featured special issues seeking to define the normative ethical practices of authors, reviewers, and editors. In response to this, a group of Editors from the fields of Industrial/Organizational Psychology and Management assembled to draft a voluntary Code of Conduct defining some general behaviors they agree are important to maintaining the ethics and integrity of scientific inquiry. Since that time the list of signatories has grown to include over 200 Editors and Associate Editors.

5. Academy of Management Journal (<http://amj.aom.org>) calls for timely research.

The current editor Gerry George (2014-2016 term), is calling for new research on new topics important in the contemporary era. The topics include climate change and management (June, 2014 issue), aging populations and management (August 2014 issue), organizations with purpose (Oct 2014), and rethinking governance and management research (Dec 2014).