INTRODUCTION

There are a host of seemingly insoluble problems in higher education today, as students, parents, educators, and government officials continue to attest (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Brandon, 2010; Deresiewicz, 2015; Hacker & Dreifus, 2011; Khurana, 2007). Within business schools, we have been told that the end is near (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), that management education is at risk (Olian, 2002), if not hopelessly adrift (Arum & Roksa, 2011), and that we are no longer relevant (Pearce & Huang, 2012; Zell, 2005) or legitimate (Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, & Siltaoja, 2015). Not only do stakeholders question the value of higher education policies, practices, and costs in an era of declining enrollments and shrinking budgets, they question the very nature of the knowledge creation mechanisms (e.g., research) that lie at the heart of the value proposition for post-secondary institutions (Pearce & Huang, 2012). Indeed, an ever-increasing volume of journal space is being devoted to detailing the unarrested slide of an academic body which seems, if you are to believe authors, editors, and accrediting bodies, to care little, or not enough, about producing legitimate and impactful research (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Aguinis, Shapiro, Antonacopoulou, & Cummings, 2014; Alajoutsijarvi, Juusola, & Siltaoja, 2015; Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Bailey, 2013; Birkinshaw, Healey, Suddaby, & Weber, 2014; Pearce & Huang, 2012; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Trank & Rynes, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to review the role of conceptions of research legitimacy and impact as manifestations of the strategic intent of business schools, and to reframe discussions of research impact in terms of an underlying strategic orientation to the institution's primary stakeholders. Implications for a more mission-focused implementation of research activities are discussed.

LEGITIMACY AND IMPACT

As an academic body, it is understandable that much has been written about the craft of management research and the creation of knowledge in the management discipline (Birkinshaw, Healey, Suddaby, & Weber, 2014; Rynes, 2007; Zell, 2005), the value of our research (AACSB International, 2008; Aguinis, Suarez-Gonzalez, Lannelongue & Joo, 2012; Bedeian, Cavazos, Hunt, & Jauch, 2010; Extej & Smith, 1990; Judge, Colbert, Cable, & Rynes, 2007; Pearce & Huang, 2012; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Bachrach, 2008; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Bachrach, 2008; Starbuck, 2005), the nature and extent of scholarly influence (Aguinis, Suarez-Gonzalez, Lannelongue & Joo, 2012; Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2008), and the measurement of research productivity (Adler & Harzing, 2009).
Understanding Legitimacy and Impact within Differentiated Academic Markets

Matthew Valle

The final category of resources includes financial resources. The factors that have been previously shown to positively impact faculty research productivity include increased financial support and incentives (Podsakoff et al., 2008; Trieschmann et al., 2000). It makes sense that private institutions with extensive financial resources (e.g., large endowments, grants, etc.) might be able to attract better students, and therefore provide greater financial incentive. Private institutions are able to attract better faculty (emphasis mine). The factors that have been previously shown to positively impact faculty research productivity include increased financial support and incentives (Podsakoff et al., 2008; Trieschmann et al., 2000). It makes sense that private institutions with extensive financial resources (e.g., large endowments, grants, etc.) might be able to attract better students, and therefore provide greater financial incentive. Private institutions are able to attract better faculty (emphasis mine).
D’Aveni (1996) suggested that hierarchies based on prestige or status rankings tended to create closed systems of institutional groupings. These closed systems were considered previously in this paper as a distinct advantage for research production. However, given that these systems tend to remain somewhat closed to a limited subset of institutions, the likelihood of intellectual isomorphism (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013) within these little-closed groups increases. Hambrick (1994) referred to this setup as a “closed incestuous loop” where scholars both produce and consume their own research (p. 13). Alvesson and Gabriel (2013) lament the increasingly formulaic nature of management research, resulting in research that they argue is characterized by increased specialization, gap-spotting incrementalism, ultra-rationalism, standardized text structures, and the creation of manuscripts targeted toward a sympathetic sub-community of like-minded researchers. The rational-empirical, deductive approach to management research practiced by faculty at the leading U.S. universities dominates the top-tier journals, and with modest exceptions, excludes the inductive, qualitative approaches to research practiced by faculty at the leading universities outside the U.S. The current predominant exploration formula (a U.S.-centric model) does not bode well for research diversity and knowledge creation.

Growth in the knowledge base in the field of management requires the active interplay of ideas, concepts and theories among those inside (the community of scholars) and those on the outside of the closed system you might otherwise exclude (Ketchem, 1994). On the other hand, a vigorous exchange of ideas and insights should be the goal of the academic academy. And while I can think of individuals who excel in both domains, the vast majority of faculty do their best to maximize their value within their market domains. While the Academy of Management has broadened the scope of its annual conference and added new journals to include and highlight alternative research methodologies and applied and pedagogical research, the conference and publication outlets are still dominated by faculty with extensive, exploration focused institutions, and the limited conversations engaged in in journals and at conferences are predominantly about the legitimacy and impact of knowledge within the top journals (Pearce & Hwang, 2012; Rynes & Brown, 2011).

A growing gulf between the two groups may contribute to a situation where some individuals may be less and less inclined to participate in a publication process dominated by gatekeepers from the exploration focused institutions. These individuals may develop their own publication outlets for research which might genuinely be characterized as less impactful. Trained in the rational deductive tradition of incremental knowledge generation, these researchers may be wasting their limited time and resources studying the wrong things, in the wrong way, for the wrong reasons, and for the wrong audience. Alvesson and Gabriel (2013) put it less delicately when quoting a researcher who was increasingly concerned about the diffusion of research outputs—"there are more unpublishable papers dumbed down or more crap into more unread outlets than ever before in history" (p.246). The top outlets in the management discipline have been known for a long time, and the list remains relatively unchanged (see Podskoaff, et al., 2008). However, the number of outlets (journals) in management has grown from 540 in 2001 to 1158 in 2011 – a 100% increase over that period (Cabell’s, 2011). The publishing landscape for management research is changing, not only to a healthier and more robust market. Alvesson and Gabriel (2013) refer to this as polyphonic research, or recognition of a variety of trends, styles and research approaches. Anything which limits ideas and competing perspectives is likely to do the opposite.

We should also be concerned about a reduction in the interactions and information sharing between the two groups. If there are ever to be different missions and capabilities, it is understandable that each group would develop different systems and mechanisms to optimize and pursue their strategic orientations. However, this relies on the premise that the academy will fragment into two very different groups, the “thinkers” and the “do-ers”. Imagine a field where the individuals who develop and test theory come from an increasingly small and highly specialized group. With no feedback mechanisms from those on the outside of the closed system you might eventually see a dysfunctional closed-loop system that only feeds itself, writes for itself, and publishes for itself (Hambrick, 1994). On the other hand, a vigorous interchange of ideas and insights should be the goal of the academy. And while I can think of individuals who excel in both domains, the vast majority of faculty do their best to maximize their value within their market domains. While the Academy of Management has broadened the scope of its annual conference and added new journals to include and highlight alternative research methodologies and applied and pedagogical research, the conference and publication outlets are still dominated by faculty with extensive, exploration focused institutions, and the limited conversations engaged in in journals and at conferences are predominantly about the legitimacy and impact of knowledge creation in the top journals (Pearce & Hwang, 2012; Rynes & Brown, 2011).

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undermining the entire system of knowledge generation in management. Different groups, with different needs and different goals, may eventually give way to completely different systems for generation and dissemination. In an era when knowledge is becoming increasingly commoditised and widely available, the bifurcated model could speed the collapse of management research (and education) as we know it. Knowledge creation could be left in the hands of increasingly narrow schools of thought, guided by increasingly narrow orthodoxies. Or worse, other schools of thought and knowledge creation mecha-
nisms (e.g., content aggregators), may arise, and the field of management could become a confused jumble of com-
peting theories and models which the consuming public would be ill-prepared to sort through. Even though man-
gement science is a weak paradigm (Glick, Miller & Cardinal, 2007, 2008), and a broad toolbox of theories, models and research approaches is understandable valu-
able, what we need are not more theories but more useful theories. A common refrain is that much of management research today is overly esoteric, with too many people answering too many questions that no one has asked, or about too few cases (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, Mohrman & Lawler, 2012). And yet faculty at exploitation focused institutions continue to aim for those very publication
stitions be outsourced via MOOCs or technology-mediated
faster than our collective ability to absorb and evaluate.

The essential problem is this – we don't spend enough

about their value proposition – will their teaching func-
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DEFENDING LEGITIMACY AND IMPACT
WITHIN DIFFERENTIATED MARKET DOMAINS

The essential problem is this – we don't spend enough
time defending the legitimacy and impact of our work
within our specific market domains. We speak too often
as if we are all part of one academy, with one voice and
one set of expectations. This is not true. It is
understandable that we do not discuss these things, for we
are all busy doing the job that our domains direct.

First, I think we need to dial the hyperbole down a notch. We are not near the end of business schools, we are not
take them however we get them. The goal should be the same, but the path to that goal should not be constrained
by rigid orthodoxies or intellectual lockot. Faculty at ex-
ploration institutions have a say in this matter, as well. As
boundary spanners, we should be focused on the rapid
prototyping, testing and evaluation of evidence-based ap-
proaches to management in organizations. We are quali-
fied to do this, and we should report on research interven-
tions, and so our feedback should provide a useful
mechanism to close the loop between research and prac-
tice. At present, however, there are limited opportunities
and venues to provide this feedback. We must be more vo-
cal in communicating what we need, what works, what
doesn't, and what we think should be done about it. I be-


doing our thing well, whatever that thing may be, is

not helpful. We (faculty) live in two different worlds, and
what constitutes legitimate and impactful work in your
world may be different than what is legitimate and im-
pactful in mine. That is, and should continue to be, okay.
The problem comes when we assume otherwise, or when
faculty and administrations try to be and do things that
do not fit their market environment. The primary focus
of faculty at exploration institutions should be the produc-
tion of new knowledge. The primary focus of faculty at ex-
ploration institutions should be the dissemination of new
knowledge and the management of the interface between
theory and practice. Mission, vision and values should in-
corporate those distinct conceptions of strategic intent.

Second, the essential role of the Academy of Management
should be to develop methods for knowledge generation,
exploitation are changing and moving quickly, perhaps
faster than our collective ability to absorb and evaluate.

Exploitation focused institutions are rightly concerned
about their value proposition – will their teaching func-
tion be outsourced via MOOCs or technology-mediated
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the once the majority of management educators progress to
mid-career they interact less and less with the academy.
We often measure the impact of our work, and do so in
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Our feedback should be useful, our customer-centric considera-
tions (Galbraith, 2005). Faculty at exploration institutions are
already familiar with their "product" (significant discipline-based research. If they are good at it, and they are, they
beginning to use other ways to measure impact (Aguinis,
Suzarez-Gonzalez, Lannelongue & Joo, 2012) and are not
corroborating the general impression that citation counts
are equal important. Underestimating the impact of our
work, or doing it less well, just that it is does not represent
or support the majority of faculty at exploration-focused
institutions (the majority of management faculty).

In support of the goal of increasing the knowledge base
in management, the academy must guard against structural
isomorphism and closed-loop research output generation,
and advocate for research diversity in terms of approach-
es, methods, models and outputs. Faculty in both market
domains can help in this regard. Faculty at exploitation
institutions can be more open to the wide variety of tra-
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