# Let's do research!

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Let us start by reminding ourselves what research is! It typically should start with the identification of a relevant research question and continue with the assessment of the state of the art on this specific topic. Then, follows designing the research methods. The data collection and analysis are followed by the discussion of the findings by comparing them with the existing knowledge and thus offering a new contribution. When this is completed, the dissemination comes into play. The dissemination can for example be a book, a paper, a conference presentation, a blog, a report or a discussion. Eventually, the research and its dissemination may contribute to make change. Although the research process is long and complex and it comprises many subcomponents, we often hear scholars mentioning that they are "publishing a paper". Why has the last phase of conducting research gained precedence over the others? In the late 1980s and the early 1990s period, academic research started to be evaluated and quantified (Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). Instead of the traditional channels for disseminating research, such as books and policy papers, the focus shifted to assessing the perceived quality of academic journals using metrics like the Journal Impact Factor (Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). This marked the beginning of a continuing trend in academia, where scholars increasingly prioritized publishing in prestigious journals while diminishing the reliance on other forms of publication. The publish-or-perish culture (POP-culture) supported by all kind of rankings and metrics has created an unfriendly environment for relevant research. Support for the mainstream formulaic research, limited room for qualitative and longitudinal studies and the limited use of innovative methods, are some of the shortcomings of the POP-culture. The present publish-or-perish culture distances scholars from the research development stage and urges scholars to focus on a research dissemination stage. Perceived prestigious or top tier journal publications are given priority. This further restricts the choices for the research.

Management scholarship is increasingly under scrutiny as criticism abounds. Academia has lost reflection, and scholars are becoming publishing technicians. Most researchers predominantly continue with their research endeavors in a conventional manner. They concentrate on addressing gaps in existing literature while constructing and refining theories that often lack clear links to practical application (Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). There is an erosion of faith in the academic labour procedure (Ozbilgin, 2009). First, due the decline in the vocational professional nature and emphasis on public contribution in academic endeavours. Second, due to the emergence of self-serving and profit-oriented principles. Thus, there is an urge to return to meaning (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2012; Alvesson *et al.*, 2017; Brabet *et al.*, 2021; Huse, 2020; Tourish, 2019). During the last decades several initiatives have emerged. They contribute to developing ways of rethinking management scholarship. Champions for change argue about

the existence of a crisis. The main initiatives are addressing challenges about the institutions, the audience, the message, the channels, and the scholarly community (Huse, 2020). These are briefly presented in the following sections.
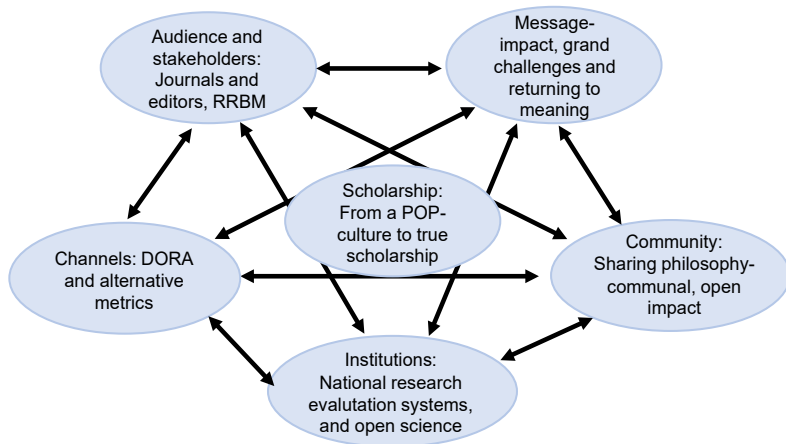
To change the equilibrium from the POP-culture to true scholarship, synchronized actions by key actors are needed. As scholars, we need to decipher the scholarly ecosystem and its components. It is important to identify the characteristics of the actors who are willing and able to initiate change, and the type of initiatives they are taking. However, the initiatives may represent global or disciplinary variations. Initial question would be then who are setting the standards in the institutions?

Institutions - Who are setting the standards for a sustainable system for assessing research at universities and business schools?

Initiatives to change institutions can take place at several levels. Initiatives include transnational regulations, national evaluation systems, accreditations agencies and various private or voluntary endeavors. The European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), the Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) and Responsible Research in Business and Management (RRBM) represent examples of important initiatives. Institutional impacts happen over time, and they have the potential to influence each other.

National research evaluation systems

Evaluation systems for higher education exist in many countries. National research evaluation systems typically make universities to systematically rank journals and scholars, and they position academic institutions as an extension of the dominant discourse of neoliberal meritocracy (Lorenz, 2012; Martini and Robertson, 2022). However, these metrics and ranking based systems may have significant unintended negative consequences. Such consequences may include that of inducing

researchers to prioritize quantity over quality, undermining societal impact, avoiding time demanding research designs (longitudinal or interdisciplinary), and opting for quick fixes, undermining research ethics (Moosa, 2018). The pressure of the metrics increases academic misconduct cases. Concerns regarding the credibility of the research findings have been raised by many scholars (e.g. Schwab and Starbuck, 2017; Tsui and McKiernan, 2022).

However, there are also diverging and promising initiatives from some of the major actors in the national systems. This is for example the case in France through The French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) (Brabet *et al.*, 2021). To avoid the shortcomings of the existing metrics and journal publication focused assessment systems, CNRS has required its researchers to exclusively present their open access publications for the assessment of their performance. The quantity of papers submitted for assessment should also be minimized. CNRS collaborates with dependable experts for the assessment of these research outputs. This evaluation encompasses more than just journal articles and includes books and as well as other varieties of research outputs.

Open science initiatives[1]

'Open science' are initiatives to make scientific research and its dissemination accessible. Open science highlights transparent and accessible knowledge, and that science should be shared and developed through collaborative networks. Suggested principles for open science include open methodology, open source, open data, open access, open peer review, and open educational resources (Kraker *et al.*, 2011). Open data encompass practices such as publishing open research practices, making research data available, campaigning for open access, and generally encouraging scientists to making it easier to publish and communicate scientific knowledge. It may be considered as one of the ways to democratize the knowledge generation and diffusion against the commodification and privatization of research within the boundaries of the traditional publishing industry that are protected by high paywalls (Brabet *et al.*, 2021; Tennant *et al.*, 2020).

There are also revolutionary initiatives such as the Octopus Platform. This platform was launched in 2022 with the funding of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The Octopus platform is a new generation publishing platform with the claim of being a free, fast, and fair outlet for primary research. Some of the objectives for the platform are to eliminate high costs and the barricades to quick information sharing, to incentivize all research outputs, to prioritize reproducibility, to address biases of positive results versus replications or negative results, to eliminate institutional bias and publication language restrictions, to improve real world application, to enable a fair and transparent review process, and to prioritize quality over quantity of research outputs (Octopus Platform, 2022). Such initiatives can enable a direct interaction with the researcher, reviewer, and the larger

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[1] See https://libereurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/LIBER-FAIR-Data.pdf for the FAIR principles and https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/open-science-open-access for EU open science initiatives

scholarly community. These initiatives can initiate further changes which may get us closer to knowledge democracies.

Audience - Who do we conduct research for? Not only for a narrow group of scholars, but also for practice

The wide gap between research and practice in management research has long been criticized. Various suggestions and initiatives are made to include other stakeholders than just a narrow group of scholars. Discussions of the causes and potential solutions to bridge this gap, have for a long time been widely debated (Rynes, Bartunek and Daft, 2001). The discussions have taken place under various connotations such as impact, usefulness, theory-practice divide and rigor-relevance debate (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014). Researchers and practitioners often live in two different knowledge worlds, and there are significant problems in knowledge production and transfer. Researchers usually investigate generalisable problems that are as context free as possible. Practitioners often apply information that is custom-made to a particular location and time frame. The location and timeframe are frequently customized, derived from real-life encounters, and tailored to particular situations (McKelvey, 2006). To bridge the theory and practice gap, engaged scholarship has been offered as a viable solution. Engaged scholarship may also allow the re-examination of researcher assumptions and researcher self-reflection (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Engaged scholarship has a focus on pertinent inquiries rooted in the real world and it is formulated through the establishment of a collaborative learning community and the utilization of diverse models and techniques. There is a continuing debate on how to bridge the theory-practice gap.

Journals and editors: Forums or special issues
Journals and journal editors have for several years shown concerns for the lack of including stakeholders in management journals and publications. For example, the number of forums and special issues on academic-practitioner relations has virtually exploded since the turn of the millennium (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014).

RRBM[2]
Another action questioning for whom we are conducting research and how the research can be more meaningful has been initiated by RRBM. RRBM is a virtual organization founded as a reaction to two main problems in management research, namely its scientific credibility and its usefulness (Tsui, 2018; Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). It was developed by twenty-four leading scholars, but RRBM has later in its summits brought together journal editors, deans of business schools, management associations' leaders, heads of accreditation institutions and prominent scholars. They have jointly discussed and elaborated the rules and actions for responsible research in business and management.

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[2] RRBM and the audience https://www.rrbm.network/

The participants crafted 'I Will' or 'We Will' statements as commitments to rectify undesirable research practices or to initiate constructive actions aimed at enhancing the credibility and utility of their research (RRBM Summit Report, 2019, 2021). It is now joined by a growing community of scholars from all over the world. RRBM is supported by many partners, including accreditation organizations as AACSB and EFMD. The latter for example, contributed to the seven principles of RRBM. These are service to society, valuing both basic and applied contributions, valuing plurality and multidisciplinary collaboration, sound methodology, stakeholder involvement, impact on stakeholders and broad dissemination. Four of the principles focus primarily on the usefulness of knowledge for the wellbeing of society, and three of them on the credibility of knowledge. The RRBM organization emphasizes engagement with practice. RRBM involves a wide range of stakeholders into research, valuing indigenous and practitioner knowledge and addressing the grand challenges to produce responsible science. RRBM's objective is to ensure responsible research with the production of credible and relevant knowledge that can be used by policy makers, business, and non-business organizations. It promotes positive business and management practices which can ultimately contribute to the wellbeing of society. RRBM calls for actions to transform business and management research toward achieving humanity's highest aspirations for a better world.

Message - What do we communicate? From getting published to meaningful research

Several scholars have made crusades against the lack of meaning in the POP-culture. Some go far in arguing that a new science of management research is needed (Brabet *et al.*, 2021; Starkey, Hatchuel and Tempest, 2009). Pettigrew and Alvesson argue in several publications that we need to rethink our professional norms, and we need to cultivate a more scholarly identity. They are focusing the needs for meaningful, reflecting, and impactful research.

Existential research and grand challenges

Scholars often voice an identity crisis in academia, raising questions about the ethicality and relevance of academic research within the current publication system, along with the value generated by this system (Brabet *et al.*, 2021; Huse, 2020; Tourish, 2019; Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). These concerns are prominent in discussions and initiatives orchestrated by different academic associations as well as in the works of numerous academics (for example Alvesson *et al.*, 2017; Huse, 2020; Tourish, 2019; Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). Voices are raised that we in our research should address the great challenges in society. Grand challenges include existential risks, such as the ones that can bring an end to humanity. Examples are nuclear catastrophes by accidents or wars, climate change, destruction of the natural environment, and unintended consequences of artificial intelligence. However, they also include challenges such as

pandemics, inequality, poverty, ecological imbalances, and socio-economic and political crises. We can approach these issues through seeing new and interesting avenues for research, but even more important, through making them the core part of why we do research. Current situation in management research seems to be quite the contrary. In a recent study, Harley and Fleming (2021) have found that only 2.8% of the articles in prestigious journals have addressed grands challenges. According to them, this shortcoming is due to the relationship between business school practices and journal norms.

The principles of neoliberalism and dominant economic viewpoints which are emphasizing growth and profitability lacking a holistic approach (Costanzo *et al.*, 2005), are also mirrored in the field of management research. This is further exacerbated by the advent of the neoliberal business school (Alakavuklar *et al.*, 2017). Willmott (1995) points to a growing trend towards the commercialization of higher education. This is encompassing both teaching and research. The current academic emphasis is criticized for limiting the societal contribution of business schools (Jack, 2020). Ongoing discussions about critical impact and intellectual advocacy highlight the historical and political ties between academic endeavours and neoliberal dominance (Contu, 2020). Ranking systems and managerialism within business schools together with their positioning within the context of the neoliberal global landscape, have contributed to the detachment from meaning in research. This current situation necessitates a call for scholars to challenge prevailing notions and to promote alternative concepts. The call is for a more liberated, equitable, inclusive and progressive global landscape.

To overcome the scholarly identity crisis, we as scholars can start by challenging the status quo and the ideological and moral basis of common knowledge about society, organizations, and management. This necessitates asking uncomfortable questions that may challenge dominant views, fads and taken for granted assumptions about management. Being curious and dubious about everything may be the key to becoming an accomplished and mature scholar. A useful way of doing this may be to learn about the historical origin of practices and theories. We as scholars should check whether our research serves as a means of legitimizing ideologies, groups, activities, subjects, and skills. An important point is to be aware of the performativity of social science theories. How a theory describes the world creates a world in line with the theory as stated by Ghoshal (2005). A bad theory may have detrimental effects on practice. Furthermore, research needs to take into consideration the specific circumstances of each context. It is crucial to understand and value indigenous perspectives. Given the Euro-American duopoly in the production of academic output (Heilbron and Gingras, 2018), there seems to be a huge gap in terms of incorporating alternative perspectives and contexts into our knowledge base. The context as geography, history, and relationships matters, and it needs to be keenly addressed.

Steps like these may help us, as researchers, distance ourselves from existing ahistorical and context-free works and may lead us toward emancipatory and humanizing research. Through emancipatory

research, we can create knowledge that can benefit disadvantaged groups.
Emancipatory research can advance and institutionalize equality, fairness, and social justice (Ozbilgin *et al.*, 2022). It can initiate liberating change for those who need it most. Furthermore, through humanizing research we can better grasp the complex nature of the human being. We need to include human needs and expectations in our analyses. We are invited to see distinct representations and identify ways to avoid any reductionist perspective that reduces human to a single dimension.

The richness in perspectives can act as important tools in addressing grand challenges regarding social and environmental sustainability. It can enable us to identify wider groups of stakeholders who are affected by the topic of research, and it can promote collaborations, and thus facilitate more incorporation of stakeholder views in the research.

Returning to meaning and polymorphic research

Management research with its POP-culture has been presented as an insular, self-referential pattern of producing academic work within a secluded academic environment (Hambrick, 1994). Mats Alvesson has presented some of the strongest critical voices against the POP-culture. He has been calling for meaningful research. Alvesson and Gabriel (2013) argue that our research is too much about gap-spotting instead of path-setting. They argue for polymorphic research, less formulaic research, and a nomadic research trajectory. Scholars need to be curious and courageous to try new methods and paths.

Key virtues in polymorphic research are openness and curiosity. The major point of polymorphism is to create alternative ways of thinking and writing research. Polymorphic research acknowledges uncertainties and doubts, has a method based on reflexivity, is aiming at non-standardized text productions, and is addressing a broad audience (Huse, 2020; Huse and de Silva, 2023).

Channels - How do we disseminate our knowledge? The metrics being used beyond publishing in prestigious journals

The use of impact assessments can bring many benefits. However, there are unintended consequences that may be harming scholarship and flawing the scholarly system. One line of discussions is that of metrics and academic ranking, and how ranking systems are leading to scientific misconduct (Bedeian *et al.*, 2010; Tsui and McKiernan, 2022). Furthermore, present impact assessments may also lead to an overemphasis of citations (Brabet *et al.*, 2020), an undermining of open access and diversity (Larivière, *et al.*, 2015), a neglect of societal challenges as research topics and a limitation of available theories and methodologies to be used (Harley and Fleming, 2021). Harley and Fleming (2021) define and problematize the process of socialisation of young scholars who become familiar with the intricacies of academic publishing. Young scholars develop a keen understanding of the metrics by which their professional achievements will be evaluated. Thus, they attribute a particular importance to the concept of secure papers or

secure subjects. These secure areas refer to topics of research that align with well-established fields of perceived valid academic inquiry with the highest likelihood of being accepted by reputable journals (Harley and Fleming, 2021; McKiernan & Tsui, 2019). It is worth noting that the topics related to grand challenges do not seem to be among these perceived secure subjects (Harley and Fleming, 2021). Tsui and McKiernan (2022) also stress the increasing scepticism surrounding the accuracy of published research findings and the disparity between the subjects investigated and the actual requirements of society or the business world.

There are also initiatives that question the use of metrics. Most powerful initiatives to change the metrics are from DORA and Anne-Wil Harzing.

DORA - The San Francisco Declaration[3]

DORA (The San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment) is highlighting the problems arising due to journal metrics. DORA seeks to challenge the undue influence of JIF (Journal Impact Factor) as the main but flawed criterion for research assessment. The ambition of DORA is towards changing practice in research assessment, which involves changing the academic culture and behavior to ensure that hiring, promotion and funding decisions focus on the qualities of the research and scholarship. DORA focuses on insight, impact, reliability, and reusability rather than what they call questionable proxies. It urges participants in the research community to evaluate research based on its inherent value. This implies that scholars should take direct responsibility for assessment rather than outsourcing this crucial task to metrics as journal impact factors (JIF). The DORA guidance includes approaching funding agencies and institutions, publishers, metrics providers and researchers. DORA is addressing challenges on a global and multi-disciplinary scale, and it aims to establish globally supporting communities.

Beyond traditional metrics

Anne-Will Harzing has a reputation for renewing ways bibliometrics can be used to access academic performance. She has, through several contributions, shown the problems of the JIF ranking system. The use of journal lists and the classification of perceived elite journals is the core of JIF. Adler and Harzing (2009) report that current ranking systems are dysfunctional and potentially cause more harm than good. They show the arbitrary nature of JIF as a ranking system, and they invite the worldwide community of scholars to innovate and design more reliable ways to assess scholarly contributions. They raise critical questions about which publications are included in various JIF categories, and they argue that evaluation criteria need to become more global and comprehensive.

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[3] The presentation of DORA is based extractions from DORAs home pages: https://sfdora.org/

Community - What is characterizing us? From egocentricity to a sharing philosophy

Many of our scholarly community leaders, as former AOM and EURAM presidents, have voiced their concerns reflected in the above-mentioned initiatives. They have echoed that the scholarly community should be responsible, vibrant, and engaged. Discussions at the EURAM presidential meetings have stressed the fact that rankings have driven an undermining of true scholarship (Huse, 2020). The holistic and multifaceted role of scholarship has been reduced into a publishing game.

There is a recent call from many scholars (Harley, 2019; Huse, 2020; McKiernan and Tsui, 2019) that senior scholars should use their experiences to develop the younger. Mentoring roles can enhance the transfer and exchange of knowledge and experience between senior and younger scholars and peers. We should believe in the training of scholars which is a lifelong training period. It is a main issue to develop a community that enables collective action and change - a community that is educating hearts. This means in practice that a life-cycle perspective of scholarship should be taken.

Creating a new game with passion and compassion

Huse (2020) identifies a new game of doing research: the sharing philosophy. The sharing philosophy is communal, open and impact driven. The communal approach is about development of the scholarly community and about programmatic approaches to research. It is not about individual credits. The open approach is about open innovation, and it is holistic. It is an integration of head, heart and hands and the importance of passion and compassion. Collaborating with young scholars and their development is important. The impact driven approach has a focus on the importance of societal impact and contributions, and that our research community should be directed towards the welfare and well-being across the world. It is characterized by working not only for, but also with stakeholders.

Is this a new game of doing research? Or is this a return to the past of true scholarship? This is not isomorphism or only an adjustment of the existing game, but it is a rethinking of our professional norms. Scholarship is not something we do, but something we are. This is a call for senior scholars and community leaders to be champions for true scholarship.

From a POP-culture to true scholarship

We have in this contribution addressed how various factors including the neo-liberal influence in academia, are contributing to the destruction of true scholarship. Metrics, the ranking of journals, scholars and universities have taken the international academic society into a publish-or-perish culture where scholars are becoming publishing technicians. True scholarship focusing on holistic assessments of and contributions to grand challenges, development of people and reflections, is not given priority. We are witnessing a phenomenon where academic faculty members are

receiving credit for publishing numerous publications in a very short period of time rather than for their contributions to reflections and knowledge creation. The publications of papers in ranked journals have in our neo-liberal academic reality been a main criterion for the ranking of scholarship. Academia has lost reflection with scholars becoming publishing technicians. Thus, there is an urge to return to meaning.

We have in this contribution communicated that we do not think hat the POP-culture is sustainable. However, we have tried to present that there may be some lights in the tunnel. We have presented routes that may be helpful for getting out of the POP-culture and the neo-liberal influence in universities and business schools. Recently, we have met many of the developments and challenges of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence and machine learning can further exacerbate the existing publishing game. However, artificial intelligence may also become a tool for returning to true scholarship, including polymorphic research, ensuring stakeholder involvement, dynamic fruitful collaborations, and scholarly reflections. Let us do research and remember that true scholarship goes beyond what machines and technical publishing can do.

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