

IFSAM Conversation Letter 1 – February 15 2021
On the First Webinar, January 29, 2021
of IFSAM Webinar Series on Management Research Evaluation

Co-chairs:

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Patricia Genoe McLaren, President, Administrative Sciences Association of Canada

Panelists:

Herman Aguinis, Professor at George Washington U; President Elect, Academy of Management

Jerry Davis, Professor at U. of Michigan, former ASQ EiC; Founding Member, Responsible Research in Business and Management Network

Gerardine Doyle, Associate Director, UCD Business School; President, European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management

Henrich R. Greve, Editor in Chief, Administrative Science Quarterly, 2016-2020

Andrew Jack, Global Education Editor, Financial Times

Silke Machold, Dean of Research, University of Wolverhampton, UK

Zhen Tang, Associate Dean of Research, Business School, Hohai University, China

Alessandro Zattoni, Director of Management Department, Luiss University; President, International Corporate Governance Society; former co-editor of CGIR

In December 2020, the Financial Times (FT) launched a survey to solicit feedback on the list of 50 journals it uses to determine the research rank of business schools (known as the FT50 journal list) and more broadly asking for input on different ways of measuring the quality and impact of management research from both individual academics and deans in management schools. This triggered an asymmetric response across the world, in particular, as regards to scholarly associations of management as well as the editors of their journals.

Academics around the world subsequently received emails from learned societies' presidents and journal editors asking them to complete the survey, with some encouraging them to identify their journals as critical to the FT50 list.

The IFSAM executive committee was concerned with aspects of the survey, particularly with the section on identifying the valuable journals, and felt strongly that this procedure was asymmetrically reaching the field. The launching of the survey, and the various

responses it generated, gave fresh impetus to the thorny issue of how best to judge the quality of management research and publications.

As part of its response to addressing the issue, IFSAM decided to organize a series of webinars dedicated to examining various aspect of the evaluation of management research, the first of which was held on January 29, 2021. Andrew Jack, the Global Education Editor for the Financial Times, was joined by a select group of presidents of scholarly associations of management, management journal editors, and research-focused academic administrators.

In this letter we provide our summary of the key insights from this first webinar. Designed to open the conversation, it may also serve as a platform on which to build and channel the debate. The months ahead will see IFSAM hosting a series of additional webinars involving other key stakeholders with particular involvement in management research evaluation including university presidents and deans, publishing houses, government officials and management practitioners.

Concern about the global diffusion of a tenure system based solely on journal publications, and, even more narrowly, on an 'elite' set of journals, is growing outside of the mainstream US management schools. When only a select few journals are considered 'top tier' and the process for selecting those journals is dominated by editors and scholars working within the mainstream schools, a whole raft of scholars are excluded and their scholarly contributions ignored. This also reduces diversity in research and publication genres or types, in particular the disregarding of books, which though allowing for a more holistic and detailed treatment of an issue, are almost completely ignored (or considered worthless) in most tenure processes.

As a result, management knowledge has become homogenized as scholars carefully craft their work to conform to a particular format (journal article) from the prestigious journals (which promote again a specific form) so as to be acceptable to their reviewers.

To the extent that this faculty and attendant research model is adopted across the world, as we have seen in the last 20 years in Europe and in Asia (notably in China), as well as in Latin America, the focus on this particular research genre and format entails a dangerous reduction in knowledge inquiry generation and diversity worldwide. The individual and organizational incentive to conduct valuable research that doesn't fit into the Western scientific paradigm vanishes if it cannot be published in the journals that are considered 'worthy' of publishing in for hiring (for PhD students) and for retention and promotion. Scholars from non-Western countries, scholars focusing on gender, race, labour,

sustainability, power, and critical management studies are to a large extent ignored and excluded. (Case in point being the recent University of Leicester decision to 'disinvest from research and scholarship in Critical Management Studies and Political Economy.')

Many panelists and attendees acknowledged during the webinar that the FT50 journal list is only one symptom of a much more insidious problem. The FT is not responsible for creating the current culture and incentive system in management schools that places overwhelming value on articles published in a select set of journals. The FT50 journal list was created to support the FT ranking of business schools, which was designed to help professionals select MBA programs. It is, of course, not as simple as saying that the FT50 journal list itself has had no impact. As the journal ranks MBA programs, and as MBA programs are a source of significant financial resources for business schools, pressure has been increased on faculty members to publish in the FT50 journals, which business schools can then use in recruitment materials as a strength of their school.

Acknowledging the FT50 journal as a symptom, rather than a cause, led to the discussion of the reasons, consequences, and potential fixes for the over-valuing of published research in "top tier" journals. As US business schools rooted themselves firmly in "the management as a science paradigm" in the 1950s, management theory, research, and scholars became constrained by the scientific production of knowledge – focused firmly on positivist, quantitative research and the idea that management theory was constantly evolving into something "better." The ideology of science became so deeply embedded in the way that management scholars think, it became the obvious solution for how management research should be evaluated i.e. through ranking and counting.

Some panelists advocated for a scalable, global research evaluation system, one that evaluates in a more nuanced manner than journal ranking lists. Herman Aguinis proposed design thinking as a way to develop a better system, while Andrew Jack and Jerry Davis talked about adding an assessment of impact for journals that are included on the FT50 list. The FT survey asked respondents for ideas on how to measure impact on teaching and society, how measurement might be accomplished at the individual article level, for alternative metrics, and additional forms of academic output that should be considered.

The session left us with far more questions than answers. Why do we need a measurement or evaluation system at all? Why can't individual business schools evaluate their faculty members' work by reading it? Why are all of the measures of quality based at the journal level, when scholarship takes many more engaging and interactive forms than just academic articles? Why limit the number of journals we view as valuable to 50? Why not an FT100 or an FT200? Why rely on a global ranking, rather than local or regional rankings?

Why are we closing the tent and actively excluding many scholars who are working in a whole range of different ways to strengthen our understanding of management beyond just the publication of academic articles in particular outlets?

These are important questions that deserve thoughtful consideration and determined action. IFSAM is committed to continuing this conversation and supporting resulting changes. Join us on February 24 for our 2nd webinar on management research evaluation. We will be gathering the views of a group of university presidents and management school deans from around the world.

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