Editorial:

Research Quality: What it is, and how to achieve it

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ABSTRACT

Researchers are under constant pressure to publish high-quality research. What, however, constitutes high-quality research? Most universities use accepted lists of top-tier journals, citation counts, or other metrics to assess the value of research contributions. We first explore the metrics by which research contributions are evaluated. These metrics provide at least some indication of the impact and value of an academic's stream of research.

We then consider the issue of value beyond the commonly accepted metrics of article counts and citations. Should high-quality research create value for students and, especially in the case of business academics, for managers and practitioners? If so, rather than focusing exclusively on theoretical contributions, researchers should demonstrate the value-in-use of the research stream to the broader community. We present a set of conditions to support a research stream that delivers value-in-use to students and practitioners.

We then turn to whether high-quality research implies finding solutions to societal challenges and problems. This would require a rethinking of the traditional views on the university's relationship with society at large. We explore issues of research concerning its contribution to society. We conclude by distilling these issues into several pieces of advice to new and mid-career academics regarding strategies and challenges in developing high-quality research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers are under extreme pressure to publish high-quality research. What defines such research, though? Is it only research published as articles in journals recognized worldwide as journals of distinction and exemplars of excellence? If so, research must be both original and courageous (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, and Kock, 2021), as this research is published in the leading journals.

Must high-quality research (also) create value for students? If so, then exoteric theories probably are not of interest. Instead, researchers should find a way to demonstrate the relevance of what they discuss so students will appreciate the value-in-use of the research (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Naudé, 2020b).

Does high-quality research perhaps entail providing solutions to grand challenges and wicked problems that society faces? This would call for researchers to redefine the traditional views on universities' relationship with the wider society (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Evald, Clarke, Bjørn-Andersen, and Lambert, 2021). Would a redefinition then mean that researchers should be obliged to collaborate more with practitioners (Di Benedetto, Lindgreen, Storgaard, and Clarke, 2019)?

Should researchers pursue all three objectives simultaneously? In this editorial, we attempt to answer what characterizes research quality before we first examine how to achieve and subsequently evidence research of high quality.

2. WHAT RESEARCH QUALITY IS

2.1. What Research Quality Historically Is

Research assessment plays an essential role in academic appointments, in annual performance reviews, in promotions, and in national research assessment exercises such as the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the United Kingdom, the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) in the Netherlands, and the South African Research Assessment. Having a successful research assessment also plays a crucial role in establishing peer esteem within sub-disciplinary groups. Thus, having a fair and transparent research assessment process is of prime importance.

Academic disciplines assess success by scrutinizing an individual's published research outputs, including journal articles, books, and book chapters. In some disciplines such as arts and history, books play a more prominent role, but the focus is more on journal articles in the management disciplines. Books and book chapters tend to elaborate and consolidate the leading-edge work in journals and not being original. Books and book chapters are usually less prestigious than journal articles.

The traditional way of judging research success was for experts to make qualitative assessments of published research portfolios. In the last two decades, however, research assessment increasingly uses quantitative indicators.

Journal Metrics

a) *Journal-Ranking Lists*: Among the top echelons in academic sub-disciplinary groups, elite journals' publications are one of the most critical high achievement research measures. Such publications provide an indication of merit based on the assurance provided by a rigorous double-blind review process involving two and, more often than not, three and even four reviewers, as well as an **original and courageous** contribution to the academic discipline. The list of elite journals for the marketing discipline within different geographical regions tend to follow the USA lists. The most highly regarded lists for elite journals are the UT 24 Dallas list and the *Financial Times'* FT 50 list. Four marketing journals feature on the UT 24 Dallas list: *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Marketing Science*. The FT 50 list considers *Journal of Consumer Psychology* as a fifth elite marketing journal. Other journal lists exist, however.

The Academic Journal Guide (AJG) lists six marketing journals as elite journals. Five of these journals are identical with the ones on the FT 50 list; the sixth journal is *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.

The Australian Business Deans Council Journal Quality (ABDC) ranks *European Journal of Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, and *Marketing Science* as elite journals. Thus, in addition to the six marketing journals that appear on the AJG list, the ABDC list has five other marketing journals as elite journals.

The journals that the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) considers elite journals are identical with the elite marketing journals on the AJG list; and

The German Academic Association for Business Research (VHB-JOURQUAL) list is similar to the UT 24 Dallas list.

Finally, many universities and departments have developed their journal-ranking lists, such as the Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM) list, which has *International Journal of Research in Marketing* plus all the elite marketing journals from the AJG list.

How is it possible to determine the ranking of journals? One simple approach would be to do as an eminent US marketing academic once said in a joking way, "the best journals are those I publish in." In practice, however, it turns out that each journal-ranking list has its own classification system. For example, the AJG list comprises 1,703 journals distributed across 22 subject areas. The subject area of marketing has ranked its 76 journals as follows (AJG, 2021, p. 12):

- 35 journals are ranked as 1 (i.e., "These journals, in general, publish research of a recognized, but more modest standard in their field.");

- 21 journals are ranked as 2 (i.e., "Journals in this category publish original research of an acceptable standard.");

- 12 journals are ranked as 3 (i.e., "3 rated journals publish original and well executed research papers and are highly regarded.");

- 2 journals are ranked as 4 (i.e., "All journals rated 4 (whether included in the Journal of Distinction category or not) publish the most original and best-executed research."); and

- 6 journals are ranked as 4* (i.e., "Journals of Distinction. Within the business and management field including economics, there are a small number of grade 4 journals that are recognised world-wide as exemplars of excellence.").

The other journal-ranking lists mentioned follow somewhat similar *modus operandi* when developing their classification systems, for example, CNRS' 1/2/3/4 classification and VHB-JOURQUAL's classification A*/A/B/C/D.

While a journal's impact factor and cite score are essential considerations in developing the journal-ranking list, other factors have significant influences. These factors include the status of the editors-in-chief and the editorial board members of the journal and historically determined institutional factors within the discipline. While the methods for arriving at the journal-ranking lists are publically available, they ultimately rely on subjective judgments of the established experts in the field. For example, in addition to a weighted average of various journal metrics, the AJG list relies on the 53 members of its scientific committee that cover the

guide's 22 subject areas. These members are eminent scholars who work in a particular subject area and in other areas, thus enabling the members to judge the standing of journals in their subject area relative to journals in other subject areas. In addition, the 53 members carry out consultations with expert peers and learned societies (e.g., the American Marketing Association).

However, the journal-ranking lists can be criticized for stifling innovation by academics working in emerging areas. Furthermore, an unfortunate consequence is that the journal (in which an article was published in) is used in isolation neglecting a fuller assessment of the research contribution. Thus, journal-ranking lists cannot solely determine research quality.

b) *SCImago Journal & Country Rank*: SCImago journal & country rank can be considered the "average prestige per article," and is based on the idea that not all citations of a scholar's work are the same. (In other words, a scholar's articles could be cited in publications of varying prestige.) Here, the academic sub-discipline, quality, and reputation of the journals in which the publications are cited have a direct effect on the 'value' of a citation.

c) *Impact per Publication*: Impact per publication is a metric of the average number of citations an article in a given journal will receive over three years. The three-year window is used as a reasonable benchmark to measure citations in most research sub-disciplines (note that standard impact factor, however, uses a two-year window).

d) *Source-Normalized Impact per Paper*: This metric normalizes citations, by weighting citations based on total citations within a given academic sub-discipline, to obtain a raw impact per publication. Thus, source-normalized impact is a measure that adjusts for contextual citation impact: a given citation will receive a higher score if it is published in an academic sub-discipline with comparatively fewer citations.

Article-Level Metrics

a) *Citations*: Support from the use of citations as an indicator of scientific contribution comes from Robert K. Merton, the 20th century's leading sociologist of science, who called citations as "a pellet of peer recognition" (Merton, 1988, p. 622) Merton emphasized that citations were an essential part of normative behavior among researchers. Citations are a considered, formal, and obligatory activity that include a moral imperative to cite others. Rather than treating all citations as equal, though, it is important to distinguish between different types of citations. There can be application citations (when authors cite a publication because they use its findings, methods, or concepts); affirmation or negation citations (when authors cite a publication because their results confirm or negate the findings of the cited article); review citations (when authors cite a publication to illustrate what prior literature has studied); and

perfunctory mentions (when authors cite a publication without really using it). Application citations reflect more important scientific contributions because such contributions shape a research stream.

b) *Field Weighted Citation Impact*: It is understandable that newer publications have fewer citations than those publications that were published years ago. In addition, there are different practices and conventions across academic sub-disciplines regarding article citation, hence there is a need to normalize citation impact measures to account for these differences. Field-weighted citation impact makes these required adjustments. Field-weighted citation impact considered the number of citations received by a publication divided by the average number of citations in publications in the same field, by type and year of publication. An index is created in which a value above 1 indicates above-average citation impact for a given publication; below 1 means below-average impact.

c) *Altmetrics*: Recently, media impact measures have been available, such as Altmetrics, to indicate the use of the publications outside academic circles. Altmetrics are metrics and qualitative data that are complementary to traditional, citation-based metrics. Altmetrics are sourced from the Web tell about how often journal articles and other scholarly outputs like datasets are discussed and used worldwide.

Author-Level Metrics

a) *Scholarly Output, Journal Count, and Journal Category Count*: Journal-ranking lists have a significant influence on academics' publication strategies. Thus, scholarly output (i.e., how many publications does a scholar have), journal count (i.e., the diversity of a scholar's publication portfolio), and journal category count (i.e., in how many journal categories a scholar has published) are important considerations.

To gain further insight into a publication's scientific research contribution, a longer-term assessment that examines how the research contributes to discovering and verifying knowledge in the academic sub-discipline is needed. The citation profile provides an indication of the use of the research.

b) *Indices*: Several metrics exist to measure scholarly performance, designed to account for important criteria such as the researcher's total citation count, and the number of publications that have high citation counts. One common metric is the h-index, which measures the researcher's productivity and citation impact. The h-index is the maximum value of h for a given researcher, where the researcher has h publications that have been cited a minimum of h times. (An h-value of 10 means that the researcher has at least 10 publications that have been cited 10 or more times.) Thus, the h-value in an indicator of both quantity and quality. It

considers both the number of publications and the number of citations, where the latter is evidence that other academics find this researcher's publications to be of high quality. Jorge Hirsch, who created the index, suggested that an h-value of 40 over a 20-year academic career would be considered 'outstanding'. The benchmarks will differ by academic sub-discipline (space science researchers, for example, have many more citations on average than have social science researchers). There is also an m-index, which is the h-index divided by the scholar's number of active research years.

Due to the abovementioned differences in citation conventions across sub-disciplines, and other factors that affect number of citations (methodological and review publications tend to have much higher citation counts than have other publications), other metrics have also been created. For example, the g-index (created by Egghe) is a modification of the h-index that adjusts for the fact that a few publications may have a very large number of citations, which can offset lower-cited publications. By definition, the g-index is either equal to or higher than the h-index, due to this offsetting effect.

Another option is the hg-index, which derives from both the h-index and g-index. This index is calculated as the geometric mean of the researcher's h- and g-indices and thus is purported to capture both metrics' advantages. The hg-index will, for example, reduce the g-index's tendency to place substantial weight on a very few highly cited publications, thereby presenting a more balanced measure of the researcher's overall citation impact.

Unlike previous metrics that consider the number of publications, the L-index focuses on the number of different co-author contributions and age of publications. The L-index can range from 0 to 9.9; a Ph. D. student or postdoctoral researcher usually will have a score under 3, and a principal researcher might score in the range of 5. (For comparison, Darwin and Einstein's L-indices are, respectively, 9.7 and 9.8.)

Finally, a composite citation score, or C-score, compiles six different citation-related criteria into an overall measure of a researchers' academic performance. The C-score also adjust for self-selection bias (accounting for citation of one's own works). This metric measures the researcher's career-long citation impact in refereed journals. Indeed, in the next section we explore the issue of refereed journal quality, and how to assess this quality.

c) *Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science Databases*: It is easy to count total number of publications, number of publications in "quality" journals (determined by appearance on some accepted list of journal quality), or number of citations. Through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, we now have metrics available to us that can offer more refined and

nuanced metrics of research quality and scientific contribution. These metrics are increasingly challenging the simpler measures that relied upon in the past.

d) *Clarivate™ Web of Science and Stanford University Composite Index*: The Clarivate™ Web of Science and the Stanford University Composite Index measures scientific performance based on high citation count. These assessments measure performance in terms of citation impact measures over the researcher's full career over the past decade and the previous year.

Clarivate™ publishes an annual list of the most influential researchers, as assessed by number of citations within the last ten years. In 2020, a total of under 6,200 researchers (one-tenth of one percent of academic scholars worldwide), organized into 21 research fields, were named to this list. The Clarivate™ assessment is a metric that identifies how much a researcher's publication portfolio has contributed to scientific knowledge, based on the idea that the most-cited entities (both papers and researchers) will have the biggest impact. The metric identifies the researchers within the top one percent in their research field in terms of highly cited publications per year, as identified in the Web of Science™.

Most recently, Clarivate™ has introduced the Web of Science™ Author Impact Beamplots that visualize the range of a researcher's publication and citation impact over time (Szomszor, 2021). This visualization tool shows the underlying data behind the h-index and other composite scores. Citation counts are normalized and are measured as percentiles. The tool is not biased against researchers who have published less because they have taken leave of absence for whatever reason. The beamplots include the following information for each year: citation percentile of each article and the average citation percentile (i.e., yearly median). The average citation percentile for all articles through time (i.e., global median) is also shown in the beamplots. The tool allows authors to examine their portfolio of publications and provides a picture of a researcher's impact relative to other researchers.

Another metric for outstanding research contribution is the Stanford University Composite Index. Here, a composite index is developed based on a wide variety of indicators, based on data ranging from 1996 to 2019, and including seven million scientists in a range of academic disciplines, including business, sciences, and engineering. The composite index is obtained both for the academic's full career and for the most recent year in the index.

2.2. What Research Quality Now Is

When assessing scientific contribution, it is crucial to go beyond focusing on short-term measures of which journal the work is published in. A more objective assessment is needed, consisting of a portfolio of indicators about how the article and subsequent articles contribute

to advancing scientific knowledge and broader considerations about how the research influences practice.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) makes recommendations on how to improve research assessment, balancing both indicator-driven and peer review-driven assessment methods (DORA, 2021). For example, rather than focusing solely on journal impact factor as an assessment of a single article, DORA recommends using other metrics for context (such as five-year impact factor, EigenFactor, SCImago, h-index, and editorial/publication time), or by using article-level metrics that assess the specific article's scientific content. Inappropriate manipulation of metrics is unacceptable, and publishers should be clear about how "inappropriate" is defined and what will be done when the guidelines are violated. Publishers should also consider that type of article (e.g., meta-analyses versus normal research papers) and research subject area will affect impact numbers and should therefore be careful when using or comparing impact scores.

DORA suggests the elimination of journal-based metrics in funding, appointment, and promotion decisions. Instead, a broad range of measures should be used, including research output (such as datasets or software) and qualitative measures of research impact (such as public policy or managerial practice implications).

DORA also recommends assessing research articles on their own merits (such as scientific content) rather than using journal impact factors or similar journal-based metrics. Where possible, the primary literature should be cited such that the researchers who made the initial contribution are appropriately recognized. The over-reliance on journal impact factors should be questioned; DORA recommends promotion and adoption of more direct measures of article contribution, such as the value and influence of the research output.

As a final consideration, there are many opportunities afforded to researchers now due to online publication options. For example, word count limits and restrictions on the number of figures, tables, or references in articles are now unnecessary in many cases and may be relaxed. Additionally, new indicators of the significance and impact of online publications should be developed.

3. HOW TO ACHIEVE RESEARCH QUALITY

To make a significant, high-quality scientific contribution, a researcher should have developed and executed a research stream successfully. Here, we identify five initial conditions for a successful research stream and five key conditions.

3.1. Five Initial Conditions Supporting a Research Stream

The five initial conditions are:

1) *Research problems leading to research opportunities*: The researcher(s) must be able to identify a substantive research problem of academic interest, which has the potential to develop into further research opportunities in the future. This is not the same as finding a "gap in the literature," and the researcher should be able to offer more justification than simply "filling the gap." Professor Rob Morgan puts this challenge succinctly (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2021, p. A13):

> "You do not find a gap, you 'create' it: Lack of conceptual or empirical precedent does not constitute a gap. Finding a research gap is elusive. Authors should construct arguments around the: (i) importance of the topic for research, policy, and practitioner audiences for example; (ii) the deficits in prevailing insights and explanations; (iii) contributions that will be derived; (iv) novelty of the approach of your work; and, (v) consequences of potential findings."

2) *Initiating research stream*: The researcher(s) must be able to assemble a research team that can achieve the identified research potential. The team should be motivated to identify research opportunities and insights, as well as to produce top-quality articles, which can reach the highest-level journals. Team members should be passionate about research and publishing, work well in a team environment, and possess complementary skills. Professor Ko de Ruyter writes that (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020a, p. 2):

> "My mantra throughout my career has always been to work with a set of collaborators who like to work hard and play hard. I find it very rewarding to work late in the office with a group of people trying to meet a deadline, order pizza in, watch football, and go out for a drink to celebrate whatever milestone (like making the deadline by one minute). I know that some people keep insisting on solo-authored papers, but where is the fun in that?"

3) *Clarity in expression*: The researcher(s) should be able to state a clear academic argument, which will serve as the basis for the research team's work. A new research stream may face an uphill battle, especially if it is seen as challenging conventional thinking; the team needs to anticipate this response and be prepared to defend why it is challenging the status quo. Professor Christian Grönroos addressed this issue (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020a, p. 8):

> "I characterized my research approach quoting Frank Sinatra: "I did it my way." In my view, this is a good piece of advice to any young researcher. Dig where no one else has done it before, and you may make a quantum leap. Break out of the box, and you will find that there was no box, only a random construction by the research community. Following the mainstream may be an easier road forward, but probably it will not generate outcomes that are remembered."

4) *Teamwork within a network of scholars*: The researcher(s) should identify a network of academics who will embrace and broaden the research opportunities. This can be done through

publishing seminal articles to introduce the research stream, hosting workshops, forums, and special conference sessions, and getting early results from these sessions published in special journal issues. Internationally known academics also add credibility to the research stream and to the network. Mutual respect for the skills and abilities of the network's members is critical to building openness and trust. Professor Ajay Kohli discusses this (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020a)

> "I … had the opportunity to work with very smart and interesting people in my doctoral program and, following that, in my professorial career. I learned an enormous amount about doing research and effective writing from them. It was a blast to work with them and, unsurprisingly, I did my best work with them." (p. 1)

> Through these practitioner interactions, I learned about issues on practitioners' minds, and the language they used to talk about those issues. I also obtained data for research—both in stand-alone ways (e.g., surveys), as well as in more engaged ways (e.g., interviews, focus groups). (p. 2)

5) *Platform to consolidate knowledge*: The researcher(s) must also publish research that provides a consolidated view of the emerging knowledge. This research establishes the early findings from the research and provides foundations for future research. An academic book summarizing the early research findings, for example, may be an appropriate platform. For more on this topic, we refer to our editorial on how to build research groups. This editorial discusses the success of both the IMP Group and the CMP Group when it comes to build research groups with an impact (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Naudé, 2020a).

3.2. The Five Key Conditions Supporting a Research Stream

Next, building on these initial conditions are the following five key conditions:

1) *Role of theory and theorizing:* There is a need for innovative thinking about theory and theorizing. Here, the emphasis should be on process theorizing, so that the researchers are not stuck in a situation lacking either real world data, or a sufficiently high level of abstraction. Industry practitioners and customers can provide useful insights for theory development. For more information, we refer to Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Jaakkola (2021) and Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, and Kock (2021).

2) *Getting research accepted:* The research team will likely face opposition to their innovative research that challenges academic convention. Team members, therefore, need to have the persistence to get acceptance and publication at the highest-quality journals. Their research may face a similarity bias barrier—reviewers are familiar with certain norms and practices, which the new research challenges. This is where editors can play a crucial role by recognizing innovative, challenging new research, and encouraging the research team. A rigorous yet developmental review process, allowing sufficient time for development, will

result in clear, theoretically sound, innovative research articles. For a discussion of this topic, we refer to Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, Fehrer, and van der Borgh (2020).

3) *Getting research recognized*: The researcher(s) should ensure that others in the academic community recognize and understand the research stream. This condition can be accomplished by presenting at workshops, forums, and conference special sessions where top academics outside the research network are exposed to the research and understand it. These traditional methods for creating recognition are increasingly complemented by Google Scholar, Mendeley, Academia, and other publisher platforms. We refer to Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, Fehrer, and van der Borgh (2020), who discuss this topic in more depth.

4) *Tenacity and resilience*: The researcher(s) must have the tenacity and resilience to work toward acceptance and recognition among fellow academics. As noted above, innovative new research is usually met with resistance. The research team must believe strongly in what it wants to accomplish and be prepared to work hard to gain the acceptance the team feels its work should receive. For further thoughts on this topic, we refer to Lindgreen and Di Benedetto (2020a).

5) *Sustaining leadership and innovation*: The researcher(s) should also ensure that there is a plan for sustained research leadership and innovation. Distributed leadership is a key to empowering leadership, stimulating innovative new ideas, and maintaining the momentum of the research team. Ultimately, the team might feel it has reached a natural conclusion to the research stream in some cases. If this occurs, the team members should plan further directions: can the research stream suggest more new and innovative research directions? Here, we refer to Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Naude (2020a) who offer more thoughts on this topic.

3.3. Research, Teaching, and Societal Value

The research community recognizes that research cannot be contained within a silo. There should be a strong connection between research and teaching, and research should—eventually—contribute with societal value. As these topics have both been examined in past editorials, we will only discuss them briefly here.

Research and teaching: The best teachers, arguably, facilitate the co-creation of learning with students (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Naude, 2020b). Teachers are service providers whose role is to provide value. Teachers who offer the greatest value to students combine their resources with the students' skills, capabilities, resources, and enthusiasm, thus jointly co-creating value. This value can be exploited such that resources are developed and value-in-use is co-created, allowing students to achieve potential. Once the co-created resources are in place, students can continue to enact the value-in-use in future applications.

Co-creation of learning can only be achieved through great teaching that transcends the traditional one-directional, instructor-to-student learning process. Learning processes must be facilitated in three directions (instructor-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-student), so that all actors participate in, and benefit from, value co-creation. Professor Gerrit van Bruggen notes the importance of explicitly including students, including those in executive education classes, as an audience for the manuscript (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2020b, p. A2):

> "To me, the most important thing by far is that a manuscript deals with an issue that is highly interesting and relevant to the targeted readership. This relevance should be so obvious that the manuscript does not need a lot of words or selling to make this clear. Intuitively, readers should immediately feel curiosity and want to start or continue reading. I personally feel that the criterion, "will my students (non-Ph.D.) enjoy reading this manuscript?" is a really good one. If I can include the manuscript in my course readings (for undergraduate to executive courses), that is a big plus. In industrial marketing, this means that every industrial marketer should immediately understand why the documented research is important and relevant."

Societal value: Society views universities as a source of solutions for global issues; national governments have in fact increasingly included societal value as a criterion for funding allocation. Researchers at business schools, in particular, need to define how their research indeed adds value to business and society, and to be able to document the societal value contributions (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Evald, Clarke, Bjørn-Andersen, and Lambert, 2021). Much has been written about the academic-practitioner gap; ideally, research should be shown to have both relevance and impact to narrow this gap. That is, research activities should provide relevant, valuable results, and the activities should also show documentable contributions that benefit individuals, organizations, society, and/or the economy.

Professors Heiner Evanschitzky and Luigi De Luca have both written about the importance of narrowing the academic-practitioner gap, and what specifically can be done to achieve this goal (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2021). First, quoting Professor Evanschitzky:

> "To be honest, manuscripts are hardly ever rejected for a weak managerial implication section. However, […] having written a very strong case for the practical importance of the research might be a way to get a manuscript past the first round of reviews […] if I as a reviewer can see how relevant findings are for practice, I am inclined to not reject a manuscript because my strong belief is that our research must be relevant outside of academia […] if I can see at least a strong implication for management practice, I am willing to work with the authors to re-focus and tease out the overall contribution […]. [One way] to demonstrate the managerial relevance of the findings would be to do a simulation. What would happen if your independent variable(s) change by one unit? What would be the consequence(s) for down-stream outcome variables? How important or relevant would those changes be?" (p. A15)

Professor De Luca extends this line of reasoning:

"Managerial implications should not be an afterthought. They are a great opportunity to elevate your manuscript. A strategy I have used in recent manuscripts is to write managerial implications in 3-5 action-oriented paragraphs, each opened by a direct and normative statement for managers such as "Create a data-driven culture' or 'Sync your strategy with your industry lifecycle'. When possible, I try to engage managers, as I am writing the manuscript to generate and/or test these statements, for example during a company workshop or executive education session. Also, I try to make the managerial implication section reference-free, and to keep them within a single self-contained page." (p. A15)

4. CONCLUSIONS

We would like to conclude our editorial with some advice that we hope will benefit early-career and not so early-career academics.

Publications in elite journals are necessary for peer esteem: Publication in a top journal is evidence of the originality, quality, and rigor of the research, and publication in a top journal is universally recognized as a measure of high achievement in academia. Top journal publication is, in fact, a necessary condition for a high level of research success. However, publication in such journals does not necessarily mean that the scientific contribution is, or will be, significant.

High-performing journals in emerging sub-disciplinary areas are not always recognized adequately: There is resistance to change the established journal ranking lists; possibly due to vested interest in retaining the status quo. Many of the familiar U.S. and U.K.-based ranking lists do not change much through time. The Australia and New Zealand Australian Business Deans (ABDC) list has been more open-minded and welcoming of emerging sub-disciplinary areas, and welcoming of their top journals.

The nature of scientific contribution is not clearly articulated: To assess scientific contribution to knowledge, one must consider its discovery, as well as subsequent justification. The quality of the journal publishing the research is a short-term measure at best. What is needed is an objective assessment, which indicates how the research advanced scientific knowledge and, more broadly, how it influenced practice. Citation counts provide some information, but do not provide a full understanding of how an article influenced a research stream and helped develop empirical and theoretical knowledge.

A portfolio of indicators is needed: Different metrics assess different aspects of an article's influence or performance, therefore a portfolio of measures is recommended. The evaluation process will, of course, be emotionally laden, so the decision of what to include in the portfolio will always be subject to debate. Indeed, how indicators align with the priorities and values of the research programs and the institution will be a consideration. Strict citation counts or other

quantitative metrics should not be used as a substitute for reading and qualitatively assessing the overall contribution of a researcher's portfolio.

Research success comes from cohesive research programs and teamwork: A cohesive research program, characterized by teams of researchers and clear guidance on research stream development, is more likely to result in success. Distributed leadership, including international authors and senior and emerging authors, is critical to a thriving research team. The researcher team, and not individual researchers, should be considered the unit of analysis when recognizing the scientific contribution of the research.

Sustaining leadership and focusing on innovation are critical: Innovation is driven not by a predictive logic but rather by an effectuation logic. The researchers need to consider how their research stream should evolve to address emerging issues. To obtain new perspectives, it is advantageous to have a broad, general theoretic perspective drawing from several related disciplines. Just as critical, however, is the need to develop theory with practice. Theory-in-use is vital to the theorizing process. This approach is founded on pragmatism and abductive reasoning, whose roots go back to the earliest days of management science in the 1950s. This focus is critical to the continued development of marketing as an academic discipline, as it requires constant attention to innovation from the perspectives of education, business, and society as a whole.

Institutional norms influence research strategies: The reality facing academic researchers is that the research strategies at a research-intensive university usually place more weight on academic achievement and less on contribution to business practice or society, although this may be changing, as national funding for academic research increasingly considers societal impact as a criterion in grant proposal evaluation.

Find, and follow, advice on how to succeed: For a researcher working in a maturing discipline, guidance is available on what to do early in one's academic career and in later stages as well. This guidance is available in editorials, articles, and books, which provide detailed advice on designing conceptual frameworks, building citation impact, assembling research groups, doing cross-disciplinary research, and transforming research into teaching.

Understand your capabilities: A good place to start is to assess the skills and capabilities of the research team, identify complementarities in skill sets, and consider what networks the team members are connected to. ("What do we know, and whom do we know?") The idea here is to understand the capabilities and skills, which constitute the starting point upon which the research team can build.

Focus on the overall research portfolio: Not every article will end up in a top-tier journal. Rather than focusing on a top-tier journal rejection, think instead of the developing a portfolio of articles, which can offset the rejection. As discussed earlier, similarity bias is an issue and may constitute a barrier in the review process, particularly with top-tier journals. Indeed, after a series of articles, which initiate and refine the innovative idea, an opportunity to target a top-tier journal may emerge later.

Leverage co-creation within partnerships: The researcher should develop a network of trustworthy research colleagues with whom to cooperate and collaborate. These networks provide diversity of vision and abilities, and fresh, complementary ideas.

Leverage contingencies: Unexpected occurrences may not necessarily be negative; rather, they may reveal an opportunity. A chance meeting or connection with a networking partner might lead to a fresh perspective on a vexing problem, and ultimately to research, which is top-journal worthy.

Focus on the big picture: In summary, no one can predict future research opportunities or success. As researchers, however, we can control some of the influencing factors so that we can identify and take advantage of opportunities that arise. Pasteur famously said that "chance favors the prepared mind." To prepare, researchers should keep the big picture in mind and have a wide vision for emerging opportunities.

Have fun and enjoy a desirable work-life balance. Finally, one cannot discount the importance of work-life balance. This breathes life into one's work efforts, providing focus for research efforts, maintaining a good perspective, and building trust among research colleagues.

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