

Revised version of paper submitted to the *Journal of Information Science*, August 2006

# **Aardvark *et al.* ... : Quality Journals and Gamesmanship in Management Studies**

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## **Aardvark *et al.* ... : Quality Journals and Gamesmanship in Management Studies**

**Abstract:** Publication in quality journals has become a major indicator of research performance in UK universities. This paper investigates the notion of ‘quality journal’ and finds dizzying circularity in its definitions. Actually, what a quality journal is does not really matter: agreement that there are such things matters very much indeed. As so often happens with indicators of performance, the indicator has become the target. So, the challenge is to publish in quality journals, and the challenge rewards gamesmanship. Vested interests have become particularly skilful at the game, and at exercising the winners’ prerogative of changing the rules. All but forgotten in the desperation to win the game is publication as a means of communicating research findings for the public benefit. The paper examines the situation in Management Studies, but the problem is much more widespread. It concludes that laughter is both the appropriate reaction to such farce, and also, perhaps, the stimulus to reform.

**Keywords:** quality journal; citation, peer review; publication; research; Management Studies; Research Assessment Exercise

## **Aardvark *et al.* ... : Quality Journals and Gamesmanship in Management Studies**

### **1. Introduction**

With the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) looming, UK academics can be in no doubt about the importance of publishing in quality journals. This indicator of their research performance will determine the allocation of much public funding and much private favour. The fortunes of individual departments and whole universities are at stake. US academics have long lived with the link between publication and employability, but institutional dependence on journal publication is a British contribution to academic progress. Like other Thatcherite innovations, it has inspired adoption elsewhere, and even American universities have been moved to squeeze further value from the incidence of publication in quality journals [1].

It is perhaps surprising that universities and academics were left to their own devices for as long as they were. Vast public and private resources were abandoned to a mediaeval model of governance, and a philosophical tradition that relates intellectual development to freedom of thought. This quaint system was tolerated as long as it served the requirements of an elite powerful enough to defend it. A higher education industry supplying a product for mass consumption has no such champion. The university has become a business selling education, and academics mere employees. Employees have to be managed, and their performance measured. Publication in quality journals has become the chief of these performance measures.

Universities are now managed much like other large organisations: academics are told what to do by senior managers. These managers demand efficiency, maximum output for minimum input [2]. Academics respond by doing what is counted and avoiding what is not, perhaps especially in their publications. Increasingly they are aided by the bibliometric techniques of the librarian; measures of what academics are reading now tell academics what they should be writing, and where they should be publishing [3].

“Impact efficiency, the number of citations to a journal per 10,000 words published in that journal, standardizes for size and measures word efficiency or journal-length efficiency. This measure provides potential authors with an indication of how many citations are generated by each 10,000 words published in any given journal.” [4, p. 710]

Once the primary purpose of citation was to reveal the provenance of ideas: now citation is basic to all manner of calculations. For instance, from a citation rate is derived a journal impact factor, which is the mean citation rate of all the papers in the journal [5].

“... the bibliographic impact factor of a journal J in year Y is the number of citations in year Y (in papers published by ‘citing’ journals) of papers published by J in Years Y-1 and Y-2, divided by the number of citeable documents published by J in years Y-1 and Y-2.” [6, p. 606]

Much of this statistical manipulation has been made possible by the enterprise of Eugene Garfield, who founded the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) in 1961 to supply data for the bibliographic requirements of fellow librarians. By the 1970s, Garfield [7, 8] was actively seeking other uses for his growing database of journal citations. ISI now enjoys a virtual monopoly in the supply of the data that help direct the strategic publishing of academics [9]. Eugene Fama has also been entrepreneurial. Once topping the list of most cited authors in Finance [4], he went on to head SSRN and offer a service to other authors anxious to be cited. It seems there is something to be learned: 8 of the top 10 papers in Management Studies between 1997 and 2005, the ‘All Time Hits’ of the SSRN eLibrary, are authored by either Eugene Fama or Michael Jensen, now Chairman of SSRN [10].

Citation analysis used to help librarians allocate their budgets, or to disclose major shifts in national research effort [153] can be a clumsy tool for identifying quality journals. For example, by simply counting papers on the ISI database, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) can reach the comforting conclusion that England (not the UK) ranks either first or second (behind the US) in the world in most academic disciplines [11] (HEFCE, 1998). That Canada generally ranks a close third while Germany and Japan come nowhere might have warned the

authors that ISI databases are heavily skewed towards North American and English language literature. As Weick [12, p. 663] notes in berating what he terms the ‘mindless organisation’, “You can borrow the simplicities but you can’t borrow the confused complexity that gives meaning to the profound simplicity.”

This paper investigates the apparent simplicity of the notion of ‘quality journal’. It tries to define a journal of quality and fails, frustrated by the circularity of one explanation after another: a journal is a quality journal because it publishes quality papers written by quality authors, known to be of quality because they appear in quality journals .... Our consideration of quality in the next section leads us to examine the system of peer review that is its bastion. We find in section three that peer review, far from guaranteeing standards, has itself fallen victim to gamesmanship. Gamesmanship is the subject of our fourth section, and the inspiration for our title (Oppenheim suggests Aardvark as an appropriate *nom de plume* for alphabetical advantage in citation analysis [81]). Our focus is on Management Studies (not because its situation is unique, but for clarity of example), and we speculate in our fifth section on the implications for the subject of so much gamesmanship. We conclude in a final section that the first step to solving these problems is exposing and mocking the gamesmanship that pervades the world of quality journals. In the attempt, we will have some fun at the expense of those who take publication in quality journals so very seriously. As ever, the best fun has serious purpose.

## 2. Outing quality

Just what is a ‘quality journal’? The terms ‘premier’, ‘key’, ‘core’, ‘flagship’, ‘top rank’ and ‘top tier’ seem to be used synonymously with ‘quality’ as descriptors of journals to suggest that these journals are superior in some way. Oddly, in just what way they are superior hardly seems to matter. This is because the unit of analysis is not actually the journal at all, but the quality journal. Whether is any good is unimportant: critical is the degree to which it qualifies as a quality journal.

“... if you feel that the overall quality of papers published in Journal ‘ABC’ are ½ the quality of Decision Sciences papers, then you would rate Journal ‘ABC’ as 50.” [13, p. 32]

The logic is curious, and - as will become evident - significant. The value of a quality journal lies not in its quality, but in its status as a quality journal.

Academics are notoriously poor at identifying quality journals not known to be quality journals. They tend to be very familiar with very few journals, and very ignorant of the vast majority [16, 17]. Academics think more highly of journals when they have published in them [13], or served on their editorial boards [18]. To help guide the Management Studies academic, there are lists, but none of these is compiled in isolation [19, 20].

“The initial set of journals was selected on the basis of the number of times they had been included in previous studies of journal influence.” [23, p. 475] Once a journal is on one list of quality journals, it is fairly likely to appear on other lists of quality journals [21, 22]; it is a quality journal because it is on a list of quality journals. Conversely, journals not on the lists are likely to remain excluded.

Nor can journal quality be established in terms of relational goods. For instance, one characteristic of quality journals in Management Studies is that authors from top business schools publish in them, but then, which are top business schools is often determined by publication in quality journals [24, 25, 26, 3]. Authors with the highest reputation in Management Studies publish in quality journals, but then those who publish in quality journals acquire the highest reputation [27]. Similarly, quality journals are quality journals because they contain quality papers, known to be quality papers because they appear in quality journals [21]. Zoroastrian calculations of citation rates and impact factors can be attempted to discover quality in journals, but only inclusion in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) makes analysis possible, and inclusion is reserved for quality journals [6, 28].

Rejection rates are often seen as telling indicators of quality journals: the higher the rejection rate, the higher the quality of the journal [29, 30]. Surveys of Management Studies journals find an overall rejection rate of 72.8% in 1970 and 81.7% in 1994, sure sign for some of a general increase in quality [31]. The rejection rates of about 50% that Bence and Oppenheim [32] discover among eight journals in the fields of Science, Technology and Medicine should set alarm bells ringing in the learned societies publishing them. The *Journal of Management* currently has a rejection rate

of 92% [33] and the *Harvard Business Review* approaching 99% [23], which riposte to those who would question standards in Management Studies could hardly be more robust.

There are lots of other criteria used to identify quality journals – degree of quantification, circulation, age, affiliated institution, and so on [35, 36]. All pale into insignificance alongside citation. There is a long tradition among those who study academic publishing of equating copious citation with quality [37]: the more a paper is cited, the better it must be. And the better it is, the more a paper is cited, which means that the same papers are more and more likely to be cited. Of papers cited, the half more cited is actually ten times more cited than the rest [38]. Interestingly, they tend to be published in the same few quality journals. Just seven journals (though not the same seven) account for:

- 61% of citations in 28 Management Studies journals [23]
- 58% of citations in 60 Finance and Economics journals [26]
- more than half the references in 65 Management Studies and social science journals [39]

Our efforts to define quality in the context of journals have not been entirely successful. They confirm our initial suspicion that to hunt for the characteristics of the quality journal is to miss the point: it is the common consent of the academic community that makes a quality journal a quality journal. This is expressed in peer review.

### **3. Peer review**

Peer review is accepted as a guarantee of standards in academic endeavour, and perhaps especially in academic publishing. The very existence of peer review is a mark of the quality journal, and its operation, in both screening and improving journal papers, is intended to ensure that the refereed journal publishes only good papers [40]. Peer review has such mythic status in the academic world that much can be done in its name that could not otherwise be done. Actually, peer review of papers submitted to academic journals was not common before the Second World War [41]. And quality

journals can get along quite nicely without peer review: refereeing of submissions to even the most prominent American law journals is left to students [42].

Absolutely fundamental to peer review are collegiality and professionalism [43, 44], by which we mean adherence to personal loyalties not circumscribed by an organisation, and a value system established by colleagues rather than imposed by an employer. But the academic world has become hierarchical, populated by superiors and inferiors rather than equals [45]. Without equality, peer review becomes a mechanism by which those who know little about a subject may judge the work of those who know more [46, 48-50], and justify their decisions [41]. As an instrument of managerialism, peer review has done much to undermine the professionalism and collegiality of academic life [45, 47].

The respect still afforded peer review diverts attention from the reality: when thousands of desperate authors submit papers to the same few quality journals, the system struggles to cope. The problem is exacerbated by the modern academic having very little incentive to referee papers for journals [55-57]. The work is anonymous and so does not count towards assessment. In the absence of a contractual duty to referee, editors have to twist arms:

“... people are already working 60 hours or more a week and have no time for reviewing submissions; editors have to press friends into doing them favors or tell authors who have had their submission accepted that they will be expected to do a few reviews in return.” [58]

Pragmatism is required [51]. Members of the editorial board may be given responsibility for specific topics, which can mean that peer review becomes a means of detecting deviance from a dominant view. Referees very much prefer papers that confirm their own opinions [53]. Actually, they prefer papers that confirm anything; papers that speculate are much less welcome [53, 54]. Referees like the assurance of the familiar:

“I cannot judge from the citations how strongly (or weakly) they support the arguments being made, as I am unfamiliar with almost all of them, and I don't plan to read them.”

referee of this paper, September 2006



Hard-pressed editors, reduced to round robins pleading for volunteers, are relieved to find anyone at all who will referee and are very willing to accommodate a little peculiarity.

In reality, editors – not referees – often reject or accept papers in that it is the editor who chooses the referee:

“Editors can err in the choice of specialists (indeed, it is well-known among editors that a deliberate bad choice of referees can always ensure that a paper is either accepted or rejected, as preferred) ...” [59]

Much peer reviewing is blind and often double blind in that neither author nor referee is supposed to know the identity of the other. It is easy enough to guard the identity of the referee, but not that of the author, especially the prominent author.

“Some time later a very good friend of mine got in touch with me. This friend had been sent my paper to referee. He thought that, in all honesty, he could not referee it because we were so close and he telephoned the editor to say that he would have to find someone else. The editor responded: ‘Don’t be silly, this is Charles Oppenheim. We both know that we are going to publish it anyway. This is really just a formal exercise, so could you just go through the motions?’” [60]

Editors, of course, always know the identity of authors, and editors are much more likely to reject papers from unknown authors than those from known authors [61]. It could be that known authors write better papers than unknown authors, yet even when papers, identical but for their authorship, are submitted in experiment to various journals, editors accept the papers attributed to known authors and reject the others [62]. This might help explain why so many Management Studies authors submit their papers only to the three or four journals where they are known [63], and why they know so little about other journals. As Bedeian [64] nicely explains, refereeing is best understood as a ‘social process’.

#### **4. Playing the game**

Willmott [47] has observed that the substitution of managerialism for professionalism in universities rewards “academics who willingly restrict their work to duties and activities that provide the greatest measurable output”. Academic endeavour can be particularly hard to measure. When measurement poses problems, indicators must suffice. Inexorably, it seems, the indicator becomes the target rather than whatever was to be measured [65]. Such conditions tempt gamesmanship in the Potter sense – the art of winning games without actually cheating [154]. And when the rewards are so great, no one can afford not to play the game [66].

University departments certainly play the game. Some in the UK insist that staff submit their papers only to approved journals [35, 67], journals in which publication indicates excellent research and not necessarily journals that publish excellent research. A department’s fate may hang from its selection of journals and departments take great care to approve the right journals. One ranking system recommended to departments awards points to journals for being old, fat, and charging submission fees [36], but most prefer to rely on versions of the established lists. Lists are particularly helpful to weak departments, less experience in the rules of the game and how to bend them [70].

“... the core list will allow individual researchers to make a more informed decision when deciding where to submit their work in order to achieve the most impact. This is particularly important for researchers in lower-rated institutions who are less likely to be exposed to the tacit consensus concerning journal ratings that informed the decisions on which journals to cite in submissions from higher-rated institutions.” [70, p. 108]

In Australia, just about to introduce its own version of the RAE, gamesmanship entails more than just the identification of quality journals. For example, staff at Melbourne Business School are paid a bonus of \$A15,000 for every paper they publish in a journal on the *Financial Times* list of quality journals. In some French institutions, 12,000 euro is the going rate for a publication in a quality journal. The incentive scheme of Queensland University Business School is more complicated (Table 1):

**Table 1. Approximate payments for publishing in quality journals,  
University of Queensland Business School, 2006**

tier 1 journal - \$A12,000
tier 2 journal - \$A7,500
tier 3 journal - \$A5,500
tier 4 journal - \$A2,000
tier 5 journal - \$A0
professional journals - \$A1,000

As payment is per author rather than per paper, authors can bestow riches on their colleagues at no cost to themselves, and with the expectation of co-authorship in return. The incentive scheme encourages the writing of short papers and multiple publication of very similar ones: it discourages collaboration with external authors (who get nothing) and any research that might be of any use to managers.

Editors also game. More frequent publication and fatter issues tweak the indices. It also pays to encourage appropriate authors [36, 71]. The canny editor cultivates a cadre of regulars who can be relied upon to boost the measured quality of the journal by citing themselves and each other shamelessly. Especially sought are authors whose work is so bland and so universally applicable that it can be cited almost anywhere.

Departments may rank journals, but journals also rank departments. For example, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* ranks departments by staff publications in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* [68], and the *Journal of Business* ranks business schools by staff publication in just two journals [69]. The gamesmanship of editors also extends to inflating rejection rates (an important indicator of a quality journal, at least in the United States) by encouraging authors to submit. It is important to reach the threshold above which a high rejection rate is self-created. The more authors submit their papers to quality journals, the more must be rejected. Up goes the rejection rate and thus journal ranking, which attracts yet more submissions and delivers a higher rejection rate still, and even higher ranking.

Authors play the same game. Particular attention must be paid to citation, both to impress the referees and to ensure that the publish paper is cited by others. The former

can be achieved by citing papers published in quality journals. In particular, he should cite papers in the journal to which he is submitting [75], and especially the papers in the journal that others are citing. The *Journal of Management* helpfully identifies which of its papers are most frequently read and cited (Sage promotion leaflet, 2005) so there is no need to waste time reading less popular papers. In fact, there is no real need to read much at all. About a third of all academic citation is to secondary material, which obviates reading the original. But even the secondary material often goes unread [76]. Some surveys find more inaccurate citation than accurate [e.g., 28, 77], and the same errors being passed down through generations of papers [150]. Cumulative error is apparently no barrier to reaping the cumulative advantage that de Solla Price [78] finds in citing papers simply because someone else has cited them [79].

“I once asked a successful author why he kept citing work that he privately characterised as ‘crap’. He frankly admitted that he retained references of dubious value because he felt his public demanded it.” [74, p. 1160]

The author who maximises his chances of publication in quality journals does not squander opportunities by using citation to reveal the provenance of ideas [74, 80].

“The papers they cite will be the ones they have conveniently to hand, the ones they feel it would be politic to cite, and so on.” [81, p. 155]

The author needs to improve the chances of his published paper being cited by others. Publication in a quality journal will help [74], but the wise author will not rest on the laurel. The wise author will produce long reviews, preferable of methodology [28, 37, 73]. Self-citation is always advisable [37], which means that multiple authorship is highly recommended: half a dozen authors all busily citing themselves has a healthy impact on the impact factor [9]. The wise author realises that the more a paper is cited, the more likely it is to be cited again. The result is core citation of the same papers and the same authors. The rewards to being part of this tight inner circle amply repay the gamesmanship required to get there.

Beyond this umbra of core citations in Management Studies is a vast penumbra of other citation. Reference lists lengthen with each passing year [15]. This is no accident: the more citations a paper carries, the more likely it is to be cited itself [80, 81]. Between 10% and 30% of citation is self-citation [28]. Gift authorship is rife

[82], as is hat-tipping [42, 83]. Such generosity in matters of authorship both increases the chances of citation and does the obeisance to seniority that hierarchical organisations expect. In Medicine, about a third of authors admit to making no substantial intellectual contribution to their papers [84, 85]. There is no comparable tradition of declaration in Management Studies.

## 5. Implications for Management Studies

Here we are concerned less with the tactics for placing papers in quality journals and rather more with the consequences arising from the general acceptance of this tactical behaviour. Consider, for instance, what flows from the attitude to citation encouraged by the desire to publish in quality journals. If heavy citation of a paper is good, it follows that little citation is bad. More than half of academic papers are never cited at all (three-quarters in Management Studies) [86-88], and the majority of academics never receive as many as three citations in a lifetime [37]. To conclude that a journal cannot be a quality journal because it publishes papers that are rarely acknowledged [23] is to confuse utility with excellence [88], and must be immensely discouraging for many authors [89, 90]. Much advice is proffered on how to write for quality journals and avoid this failure [91]. Of primary importance is structure, not of argument, but of the paper itself: introduction - literature review - hypothesis - methodology - results - conclusions relating results to literature. Research must look right and feel familiar, especially as reluctant referees, overburdened editors (or even administrative assistants) have little option but to judge most submissions by appearance rather than content. The vast majority of papers will not feel right and will be summarily returned [61, 94], this being the only practical way to sustain high rejection rates.

“With the doubling of submissions to *Journal of Management* over the past three years, we now have only an 8% acceptance rate. That means that we cannot move forward with every paper we receive ....” [33]

It is not enough for authors who wish to publish in quality journals to conduct anodyne research, their papers must actually look anodyne: no chance can be taken with vocabulary, grammar or expression that might be unfamiliar to a referee. From

the small proportion of papers that feel right, many will spend years in an assessment process that has become more cumbersome and convoluted than ever [92]. In Economics, most papers are submitted between three and six times before they are accepted [156]. Time from first submission to eventual publication is estimated to average about four years, not counting time taken to do the research and to write a first draft [151]. More effort, it would seem, goes into negotiating publication than into research [90, 93]. Years of re-processing to remove all possibility of fault inexorably results in desiccated, eviscerated papers. Small wonder, then, that Management Studies academics associate papers that are hard to understand with quality journals [14, 15].

While a high rejection rate may be an indicator of a quality journal, it is not necessarily the product of an exhaustive selection process. At some point – Miner [34] suggests a rejection rate of 90% – even the most searching selection processes must break down simply because it becomes inexorably harder to pick a single winner among so many losers. At this point, the editor of the quality journal must intervene if selection is not to be random among the authors, ideas and styles that are most familiar. The editor must invite authors to submit, he must initiate themes, he must fast track.

“An editor who is an experienced researcher may affect a journal’s quality by attracting active scholars to submit manuscripts, and by recognizing and selecting articles which will have high impact upon further scholarship.” [72, p. 250]

It is a sobering reality that, whatever the merits of peer review, papers submitted to quality journals are unlikely to be refereed at all. There must be many ambitious young academics, resolutely submitting to quality journals, who have hardly ever received a referee’s report.

“Certainly as a junior academic in the last RAE round I found it difficult to place papers in the so-called ‘best’ journals, because they already had such a huge backlog of contributions. I cannot even say that they refused my contributions for their lack of quality because they did not even look at them.” [1, p. 479]

Quality journals are generalist journals in Management Studies [21, 35]. Papers arising from specialised, detailed and multidisciplinary research tend to be relegated to other journals [35, 95-97], as are papers enthusiastic about practical applications [22, 118]. While there has certainly been a profusion of new journals, the indicators do not allow these to be quality journals, no matter how good the papers they publish. The esteem in which quality journals are held is neatly balanced by the disdain shown to new journals:

“New journals are established and edited collections commissioned, just to let more people get four publications for the RAE, not because they have any contribution to make to the discipline.” [99, p. 29]

Take entrepreneurship, a niche area with its own journals; academics working on entrepreneurship are advised to publish in broad scope journals if they want to get on – by the editor of the *Journal of Business Venturing*, as it happens [98].

“The increasing awareness of journal impact factors, and the possibility of their use in evaluation, is already changing scientists’ publication behaviour towards publishing in journals with maximum impact, often at the expense of specialist journals that might actually be more appropriate vehicles for the research in question.” [38, p. 2]

The Business and Management Studies Panel assembled for the RAE of 2001, faced with papers to read in 1489 different journals [100], certainly considered new journals a threat to quality.

“While some new journals fill important gaps and provide an outlet for new research thinking, there is a risk that the sheer volume of output channels may have an impact on quality.” [101, p. 60]

The Panel was scathing about papers not grounded in orthodox theory, meaning the established thinking of Management Studies as expressed in quality journals. A failure to cite papers from quality journals was a sure sign of poor scholarship:

“... at least two colleagues found it necessary to call for papers from more than 200 separate journals, and it often became apparent that their author(s) were not aware of established work in the field in which they were publishing. More worryingly, it is reasonable to assume that the papers had been reviewed

by colleagues who also were not very familiar with research in the field in which they were acting as referees.” [101, p. 65]

Because rewards for publishing in quality journals are great, the competition is stiff [32]. It is rendered stiffer still by quality journals publishing broad research, research that encompasses many interests [21, 29]. Conversely, it is argued, there is relatively little competition to publish in specialist journals covering niche fields occupied by only a handful of Management Studies anoraks. So, the argument proceeds, standards are high in quality journals and low in other journals.

“Broad scope journals, in principle, can publish any paper in the field. Their potential constituency is therefore greater and this, in turn, leads to more competition and the raising of standards beyond the point where academics are happy to submit papers published in these journals to the RAE.” [96, p. 10-11]

The greater the rewards for publishing in some journals rather than others, the more effort goes into targeting. To target a journal is to target research itself in that the more standard the research, the easier it is to target the journal, and the more certain the results of research, the sooner the journal can be targeted [40, 105]. Conformity is the order of the day in an audit world [106, 107]. Life can be hard for mavericks and heretics, for ne'er-do-wells who would resist convention and reduce efficiency. No exception is made for research. And yet, without the spice of new ideas, research becomes dull and unappetising. Far from apologising for this gruel, Management Studies proclaims its excellence [108]. The same academics publishing the same sort of research year after year in the same quality journals is declared a strength of the subject.

“These journals typically have the best scholars on their editorial boards who require the work that is published in the journal to meet the highest standards of scientific rigor. Once this ‘virtuous cycle’ is established, it undoubtedly helps to sustain the journal in its prominent position over a long period of time.” [23, p. 486]

The quality journals of Management Studies reek of stagnation. Nearly 30% of citations in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* are to papers in that journal or four others, proof (according to a paper in the *International Journal of*



*Research in Marketing* [109]), of the high standards of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. Similarly, the *Strategic Management Journal* is shameless in its publication of papers trumpeting the virtues of the *Strategic Management Journal* [72]. Over 70% of the authors publishing in the journals of the Academy of Management are members of the Academy of Management [65], and about a third of *Harvard Business Review* authors are on the staff of Harvard University [110]. About 10% of authors publishing in Management Studies journals in the late 1980s came from the universities in which the journals were based [110]. About a quarter of the authors publishing in *Organization* between 1994 and 2001 hale from just five universities [111].

Major new ideas are always rare and precious; it is inevitable that most of what is published, even in quality journals, is not the stuff of Nobel prizes. In other subjects, this seems to be acknowledged [112], but not in Management Studies. Such is the demand to publish in the quality journals of Management Studies that they publish nothing but the best. Consequently, all their papers are novel, all brilliant. The logic appeals particularly to those who publish in quality journals.

“We measure publications in top-class academic journals ... Publication in these outlets is controlled not by the business schools, but by the academic community at large who ‘certify’ the ideas through the blind review process. Publication in these journals is very difficult; typically 80 per cent of submissions are rejected. To be accepted, authors have to convince editors and peer reviewers that their ideas are novel and represent an advance in knowledge.” [24, p. 622]

In 1993, Jeffrey Pfeffer published a major paper regretting the lack of discipline in studies of the organisation, a theme he had pursued for some time. Fragmentation meant that the subject was disadvantaged in the competition for funds with other social sciences. If this area of Management Studies was ever to advance, the chaos of ideas had to be marshalled into a single paradigm: “... consensus itself, however achieved, is a vital component for the advancement of knowledge in a field” [114, p. 611]. Consensus, however, would not form of its own accord; it had to be created and imposed by an elite.

What has been happening in Management Studies in recent years reveals elements of Pfeffer's prescription to improve the health of the subject. There may be as many paradigms as ever, but only a few are welcome in the quality journals. An elite, maintained by what D'Aveni [115] calls 'homosocial reproduction', determines which paradigms will prevail through domination of these journals.

“These conditions permit a tightly coupled set of authors (who also serve as gatekeepers) and journals to develop and perpetuate a distinct set of shared views about what constitutes good research, and to implement this vision through the application of a common set of journal review practices.” [65, p. 803]

Management Studies academics scramble to identify with the prevailing ideology [116], publishing less to communicate than to associate [95]. In the quality journals of Operations Research the vast majority of papers abjure radical thinking of any kind for variations on established theory [117]. According to one publisher, much more common than 'salami-slicing' efforts to produce as many papers as possible from a single piece of research is the submission of slight, forgettable papers that have little to say [1, 56]. Research, already neutered by the targeting of quality journals, becomes a process of finding consensus [102-104, 152]. Ultimately, this is homogenous research, research that “can impose a deadening uniformity on its field of endeavour” [105, p. 1434]. Podsakoff *et al.* [23] note these developments with approval, suggesting they satisfy Pfeffer's concerns of a decade earlier that Management Studies was insufficiently focussed in its theory and methodology. They give Porter as an example of the focus the subject has found.

The Panels assembled for the RAE in the UK are supposed to assess published research. In reality, they assess ability to publish in quality journals, though they make no formal ranking of journals [40, 95]. Equally complicit in this pretence are those who submit their research publications for RAE assessment. They are to assume that Panel members actually read their papers. The Management and Business Studies Panel for the 2001 assessment simply lacked the time and resources to read all the 10,000 papers submitted to it [40]. Each of the 14 Panel members was faced with an average of 714 papers to read in the 40 days (and nights) allocated for all the tasks of assessment. This works out at 18 papers a day, plus other assessment work, in

addition to the normal demands of the day job. In fact, panel members typically read between 15% and 30% of the papers they were allotted [101]. Inevitably, the Panel assessed research in terms of the journals in which it was published [40]. The response from academics was equally inevitable: of the 53 journals in which Marketing academics published papers submitted to the 2001 RAE (each academic nominated four papers), just two quality journals accounted for almost a quarter of all papers submitted [96].

It is evident that the previous Business and Management Studies Panel, that of 1996, struggled with research assessment in a way the 2001 Panel did not [101]. The 1996 exercise was admitted to be subjective, dependent on professional judgement: “.... work of high quality was discovered in unexpected places .... The emphasis was to assess quality wherever it was found” [119, p. 77]. By 2001, the Panel had come to accept that quality is whatever is in quality journals. Publishing in other journals indicated scope for improvement. Blind to the folly of advocating one behaviour while rewarding another [121], the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the 1996 Panel used their experience of the RAE exercise to suggest how Management Studies research might improve [119]. Academics following their advice to produce more inter-disciplinary, comparative, policy work on emerging and neglected areas would have had difficulty publishing in the quality journals revered by the 2001 Panel [42]. So would those convinced by the prescription of Tranfield and Starkey to invigorate research in Management Studies with ‘trans-disciplinarity’ [120], and those seduced into closing the ‘relevance gap’ identified by Starkey and Madan by focusing on the interface with business [155].

So much for speculation, but is the situation really as grim in practice? What is actually happening in the Management Studies departments of UK universities? It is said that many have lost sight of any purpose other than to improve their RAE score [55, 99]. Staff certainly seem to be encouraged to publish in quality journals, which means performing the sort of research and writing the sort of paper these journals favour [45].

“.... most departments pressure members (each other) to do what *scores*, not what they think will contribute to human knowledge. Morale suffers

conspicuously. The system is appalling and eliminates both the lazy and useless *and* the eccentric and brilliant.” (emphasis in original) [45, p. 201]

We surveyed those departments that had submitted to RAE 2001 Unit 43 (Business and Management Studies). There were 97 submissions in 2001, though six of these departments had since merged or disappeared, leaving just 91. A short, multiple choice questionnaire was despatched to the heads of these departments in August 2005 to ascertain their departmental policy towards publication in quality journals. A reminder was sent to non-respondents four weeks later and 48 heads of department eventually provided usable replies, a response rate of 53%.

With rare exceptions, these heads of departments sketch a scene compatible with the picture we have painted (Table 2). Some 42 of the 48 departments actively encourage staff to publish in some journals rather than others, and most resort to the lists to help determine which are quality journals. Nearly two-thirds maintain their own lists, generally adapted from lists compiled elsewhere. Professional journals are definitely out of favour. Various inducements to publish in quality journals are offered, though not usually as blatant as the Australian examples we have noted. Quality journals are overwhelmingly seen as publishing mainstream research rather than niche or interdisciplinary work. The major discrepancy between these findings and the observations of this paper is that UK heads of department are unimpressed by rejection rates. This may reflect a bias in the literature towards US attitudes, but the finding is still strange.

**Table 2. Attitudes Towards Quality Journals of Heads of Management Studies Departments in UK Universities**

	% of respondents (n = 48)
Criteria to determine quality journals	
• journal is refereed	85
• journal high in ranking lists	81
• personal experience	31
• high rejection rate	8
• read by managers	4

Maintain own ranking list	64
Characteristics of papers published in quality journals	
• mainstream	81
• specialist	48
• critical	26
• interdisciplinary	21
Means of encouraging publication in quality journals	
• advice on writing	79
• exhortation	71
• promotion	64
• money	21
• steering research into favoured areas	21

## 6. Concluding thoughts

The tension between professionalism and managerialism in the modern university is almost palpable. The former requires collegiality: the latter control. In a professional system, the academic writes partly for his own benefit and partly for public benefit. In a managerial system, the academic writes for the organisation [67]. In a professional system, academics are trusted to perform. Managerialism demands indicators of performance in order to monitor the behaviour of employees. Publication in quality journals has become the chief of these indicators in Management Studies. It is probably a mistake to see academics as mere pawns in these developments or to pity them as victims. At the very least, they have been complicit, seeing protest as unprofessional [22, 122, 123]. Some have been active supporters.

Many years ago, Robert Merton [124] drew the attention of social scientists to what he called the 'Matthew Effect', the observation from the Book of Matthew that those who have most get more, and those who have least tend to lose what little they have. In the context of quality journals, the Matthew Effect affords greater increments of recognition to academics who are already recognised than to those who are less well known.

“... the same old researchers taking the same old line tend to get published. My experience is that there are only about three or four names in my field who get published. If you are not one of them or you are not connected with them, you haven't got much chance.” [60]

Merton takes as his base a collegial world in which academics create private value by making their property public through publication. In a managerial world, where performance indicators are the targets rather than performance itself, this may not be the appropriate base. The winners in the game to produce indicators of research performance feel no obligation towards the losers. No collegial responsibility deters them from exploiting their position to ensure that the indicators incline towards what the winners produce. It is the ultimate in gamesmanship to be able to control the rules of the game.

Reminiscing about a golden age when academics published to improve the lot of mankind is as pleasant as it is deluding. There never was such a golden age. Academic publishing has always been ridden with self-interest, and academics have always schemed to promote themselves. But while collegiality and professionalism imposed at least some constraint on this behaviour, managerialism offers positive incentives. Publication in quality journals has become a currency, representing value rather than having any intrinsic worth, and maintained only by consensus. Papers are published in quality journals are money rather than wealth; they are published to be counted rather than read.

We believe this problem to be serious, but we are less convinced that its solution should be as melancholy. Following Harmon [125], we suspect that ridicule and mockery might be more effective in bringing about reform than wailing and gnashing. Dare we have a good laugh at what we have been doing, or are interests so vested that everyone has too much to lose? Dare we admit that the rewards to scholarship in Management Studies are, in large part, rewards to gamesmanship? Dare we admit that publishing in quality journals has become the academic equivalent of painting by numbers? Actually, we have no choice; we are now perilously close to the ultimate in quality journals: a journal with a rejection rate of 100% that publishes nothing at all. We might start by taking what we call the ‘Tinkerbell option’. Tinkerbell was saved

by children everywhere clapping their hands to demonstrate their belief in fairies. Quality journals also need applause to survive in our academic Neverland. Ridicule and mockery mean good riddance to Tinkerbell, but Tinkerbell is a small price to pay for restoring some sanity to academic publishing.

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