

## 2010 Presidential Address

# EMBRACING THE SACRED IN OUR SECULAR SCHOLARLY WORLD

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I am honored to speak to you as our sixty-fifth president. Sitting down to prepare my remarks, I realized that I could talk with you about absolutely anything. I decided to talk about us. I hate to say it, but I fear that we are not all that we can be. Please don't worry—this will not be another presidential address that will call on us to be relevant. We are plenty relevant. The fact is this should be our Golden Age. But something is very amiss. Something is keeping us from being all that we can be. As you can tell from my title, I think that "something" is our reaction to what I am calling our secular world. My goal here is to at least provoke us—and who knows, maybe even to inspire a few of us—to live our lives differently.

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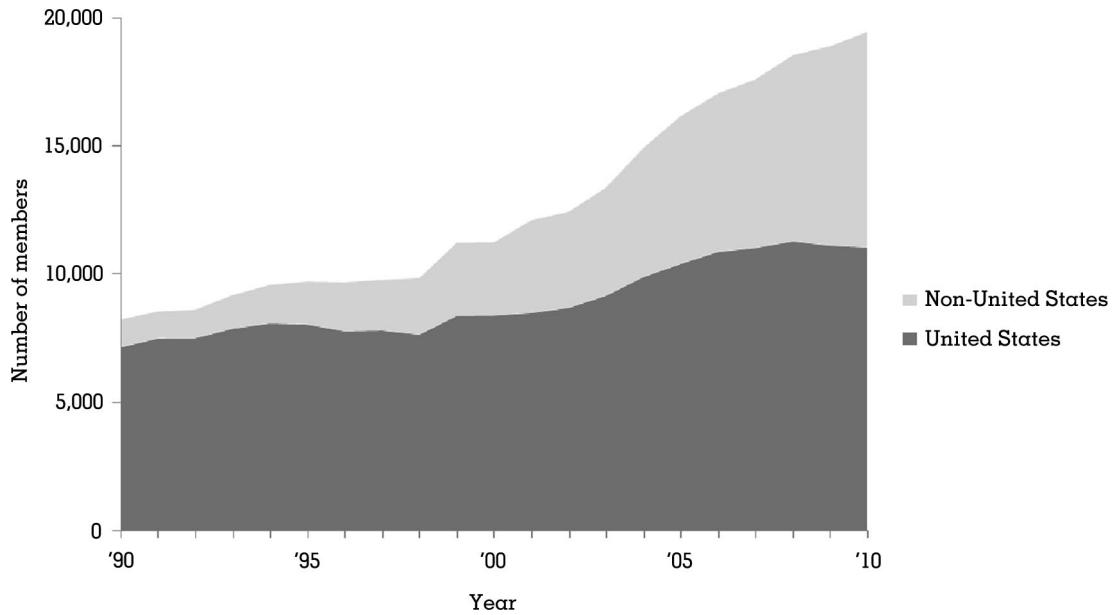
This essay complements the address I gave at the August 2010 Academy of Management meeting in Montréal. The differences are two: (1) I am now able to formally connect my ideas with other work on this theme, and (2) I have the opportunity to share a few ideas that time did not permit when I delivered the address. I want to express a great deal of sincere gratitude before I begin. First of all, to my wife, Sue Ashford, thank you for being there for the past thirty years. There is no way in the world that I would have had this opportunity if it were not for you. To our three kids—Allie, Hannah, and Maddy—what can I say? Thanks for being you. Thanks, too, to my extended family for all of your love and support (especially to Karin and Kim for coming all the way from Napa to Montréal to hear what I had to say). To all of my friends—including everyone from Briarcliff Manor, who help to make us all who we are—thank you for standing by me for so many years. And, finally, thanks to Paul Adler, Sue Ashford, John Chamberlin, Michael Cohen, Marianne Esders, Michael Gordon, Anne-Wil Harzing, Joshua Margolis, Dave Mayer, Alan Meyer, Lance Sandelands, Cathy Shakespeare, Maxim Sytch, Judith Walls, Karl Weick, Joe White, Amy Wrzesniewski, and my colleagues in the Ross School's Management and Organizations department and our Hosmer Seminar for your conversations with me about this address, and to Laura Berdish, Mary Christianson, Regina Fitzpatrick, Ira Fried, Juliane Iannarelli, Patti Lamparter, Corey Seeman, Sean Sullivan, Matt Suppa, and Nancy Urbanowicz for your help with the presentation. I am a lucky man. An audio of the address (along with the slides) is posted on my own and the Academy of Management's website. I will not offer specific web addresses here since I am sure the links will change with time. They should be easy enough to find.

My address comprises three parts. I will briefly talk about why I think this should be our Golden Age. I will then take a look at our secular world and share what gives me pause. In so doing, I will talk about the audit culture that has emerged around us, our problematic reaction to it, and the consequences of that reaction. And I will close by reminding us of the sacred nature of our work. But I will not just leave it at that. I want to share an idea or two about how to move forward. Some of us will need to summon some courage if we are to live in a world where we can thrive.

### OUR GOLDEN AGE

This really should be our Golden Age. Viewed from any historical perspective, we can see that business has emerged as a central feature of life in contemporary society—and maybe is the central feature of our lives today. People may debate whether we live in a society of organizations (Perrow, 1991) or a society defined by markets (Davis, 2009), but it is clear that business rivals the church and the state as a central aspect of modern life. Indeed, business sensibilities now inform how we conduct our governments' business (Kelman, 2007) and operate our civil society (Austin, Gutiérrez, Ogiastri, & Reficco, 2007). Perhaps unbelievably, there are now over 12,000 schools of business worldwide (AACSB International, 2010). Indeed, the Academy of Management's membership growth reveals this kind of scale. Now on the cusp of 20,000 members, our size has nearly doubled in the past ten years. Moreover, our growth rate outside the United States is now three times what it is inside the United States (see Figure 1). I do not have a worldwide estimate of business school graduates at hand, but the U.S. Department of Education (2009) tells us that we are educating nearly half a million business students each year (see Figure 2). Of course, those students go on to touch the lives of many millions more.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Academy of Management Membership**

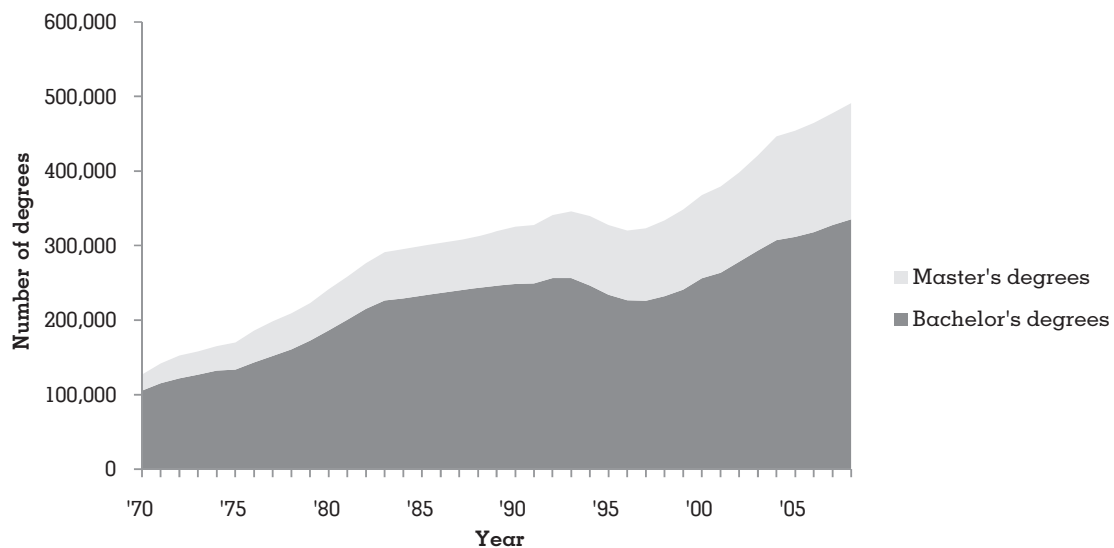


With the place of business as central as it is in our lives, and with the demand for business education as strong as it is, our time is now. This should be our Golden Age. And yet, it is not. Instead, we gather in hotel ballrooms every year and hear president after president bemoan our irrelevance. Don Hambrick (1994) started the trend with his provocative 1993 presidential address,

“What if the Academy Actually Mattered?” Here is a sampling of what our colleagues have said since:

- “We must translate our research for managers and executives, making the basic research that we do more easily accessible for and usable by them” (Hitt, 1998: 223).

**FIGURE 2**  
**Business Degrees Conferred in the United States: 1970–2008**



- “The gulf between the science and practice of management is widening” (Van de Ven, 2002: 178).
- “Many of us can focus on meeting practitioners’ needs for useful knowledge because classrooms exist virtually independently from our scholarship” (Pearce, 2004: 177).
- “All parties need to put greater emphasis on learning how to translate research findings into solutions” (Rousseau, 2006: 267).
- “I am getting fed up with the perennial talk of mattering more and feel the time has come for us to put up or shut up” (Cummings, 2007: 357).
- “Let’s be passionate about our ideas but creative and somewhat pragmatic in presenting them to the market” (Smith, 2008: 308).
- “I do believe that we must do a better job of connecting our research to the world around us” (DeNisi, 2010: 196).

What is going on here? I believe that the answer can be found in the secular aspects of our world. Let me try to paint you a picture of that world. Be forewarned. It is not pretty.

### OUR SECULAR WORLD

We are living in something of an audit culture, if not an audit regime, right now (see Tuchman, 2009: 42–47). With business schools as important as they are to society, we can only expect that society will take note and, in its own way, try to appraise the job we do. I do not need to tell anyone in our field about all of the many rating and ranking schemes that swirl about us. The list seems endless—The Aspen Institute, *Business Week*, *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, *Forbes*, *The Princeton Review*, and *U.S. News & World Report*—not to mention what the Social Science Research Network has to say, as well as assessments from Eduniversal, QS World University Rankings, and, if you live in India, PaGaLGuY’s ranking of the subcontinent’s best-known business schools or Standard & Poor’s new initiative where Indian business schools will pay a fee to be evaluated by its subsidiary, Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited (CRISIL). Make no mistake. I am not complaining. Truth be told, I am thrilled. I would much rather that people care and scrutinize us than not care and ignore us. The rankings themselves are additional evidence that our time is now.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I recognize that some people see the rise of an audit culture as a signal of a violation of trust (Tuchman, 2009). While this may be true in some cases, I see these audits as evidence

The problem is that we have reproduced and internalized this audit culture in our own universities. I fear for our future if that culture is left unchecked. Consider our teaching and research. Sure, Rate My Professors and the *Financial Times* try to quantify and capture our teaching and research contributions from the sidelines, but look at what we have done to ourselves. We, too, look to quantify our performance for all concerned. Interested in a class at, say, Michigan’s Ross School of Business? Would you like to know what other students think of the professor? Forget Rate My Professors. Simply go to our internal web page and, with a few clicks of your mouse, you will see that person’s history of student performance evaluations. A spreadsheet that was once a part of a faculty member’s private personnel file (and just one source of information about that colleague’s teaching effectiveness) is now fully public, creating virtuous or vicious circles and, worse, tempting faculty to teach to the ratings (with perhaps problematic consequences; Carrell & West, 2010).

Interested in who is publishing what and where? Well, the *Financial Times* has nothing on us. Many of us have become bibliometricians in our spare time. Without trying very hard, I found a host of recent articles considering our individual and institutional productivity (Ashkanasy, 2007; Azar & Brock, 2008; Bergh, Perry, & Hanke, 2006; Certo, Sirmon, & Brymer, 2010; Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007; Mudambi, Peng, & Weng, 2008; Peng & Zhou, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Bachrach, 2008). And then there is the work that makes its way through our informal networks—work that also tracks our productivity at a very detailed level. My colleagues recently shared two very large, privately developed spreadsheets with me. Painstakingly created, they track the most prolific authors and universities represented in our journals over the past ten years or so. The effects of this stocktaking can be pernicious. I once asked a very distinguished colleague in a well-known business school why he never wrote a

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of society’s deep interest in what we do. The enrollment figures alone suggest that our trust has not yet been breached. The U.S. Department of Education (2009) tells us that the percentage of undergraduate students studying business in the United States increased from 13.3 percent to 21.5 percent between 1970 and 2008; the percentage of master’s students doing the same jumped from 10.4 percent to 24.9 percent in that time period. Society cares deeply about what goes on in business schools.

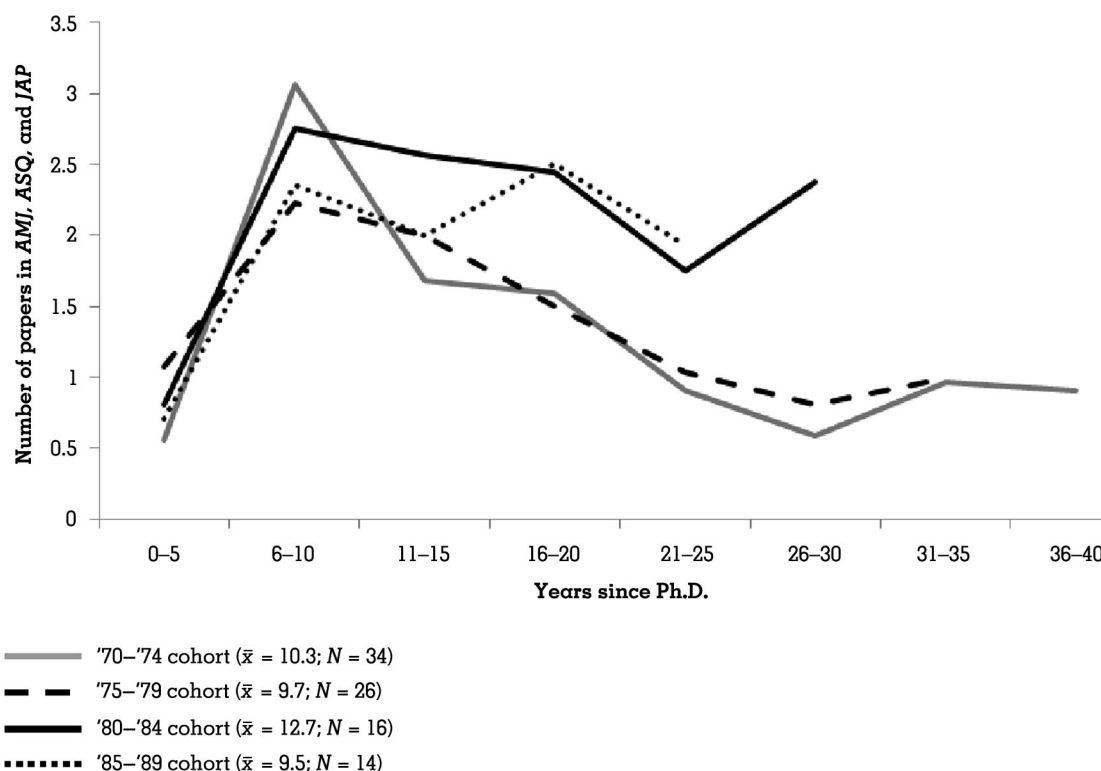
book that pulled together his many years of research into a single powerful statement. I will never forget his quick answer: "If I don't write for our top journals, I might as well be writing a letter to my mother!"

Our very best research scholars are not immune from the pressure to produce a high volume of certain kinds of work. I tracked the number of "A-level" publications that ninety of the Academy of Management's Fellows produced over their careers—tracking sixty colleagues who earned their Ph.D.s in the 1970s and contrasting them with thirty who earned their degrees in the 1980s. Figure 3 reveals a number of interesting insights, but one of them is that the Fellows trained in the 1980s seem to be producing "A-level" work deeper into their careers than their peers educated a decade earlier (perhaps at the expense of other kinds of scholarship). Of course, some might say that the more recently trained Fellows have simply contributed more than their elders. Frankly, I am not questioning anyone's contributions

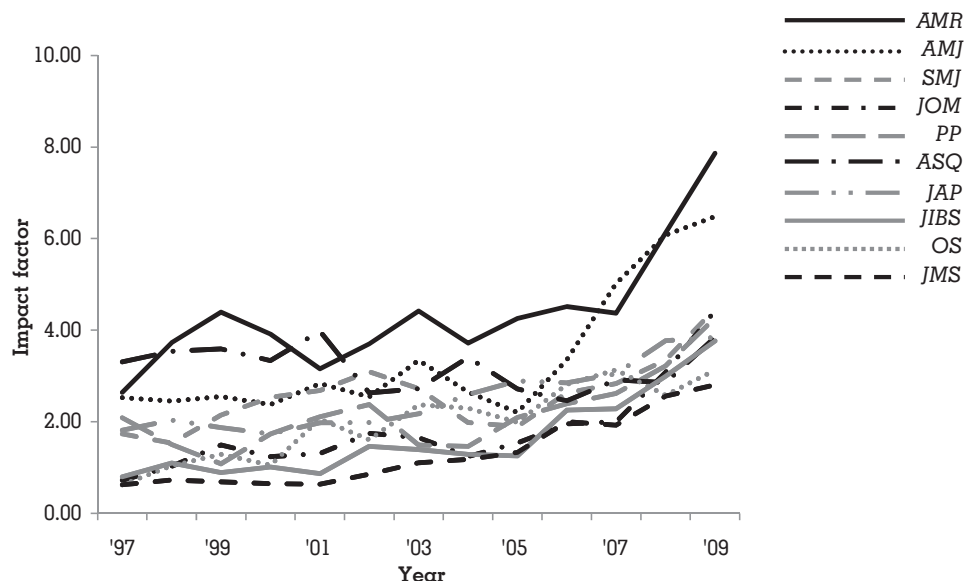
here; these are our Fellows, after all. Rather, I am suggesting that the increasing pressure to publish in select outlets is felt at all levels in our field, even among our most noteworthy research scholars.

And, speaking of privileged outlets, we now work hard to identify just what constitutes a "top" journal. Editors, authors, and university administrators alike track journals' impact factors (Monastersky, 2005). Figure 4 captures the evolution of the impact factors for eight of our organization and management journals since 1997. Of course, the high numbers for the Academy of Management's journals grab my attention as the Academy's president but so, too, does the changing fortune of the other journals in our world. Those shifts create anxiety and the incentive for editors and publishers to ensure that their journals reach and stay on "top." The recent upward trajectory in these impact factors, a trajectory shared by all of these journals, suggests that the editors and publishers have figured out how to survive, if

**FIGURE 3**  
Academy of Management Fellows' "A-Level" Publications by Ph.D. Cohort Group



**FIGURE 4**  
Impact Factors: 1997–2009



not thrive, in a world where impact factors matter as they do.<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Monastersky (2005) raised the possibility that editors now lean on authors of nearly accepted papers to cite articles appearing in their journals and, in so doing, increase their journals' impact factor scores. With the help of Thomson Reuters, I decided to take a look at this possibility in our field. Appendix A captures the annual percentage of self-references among the articles published by each of five journals in the 1980–2010 time period. While there are differences back in time, as these journals established their readership, the differences that remain today seem to be quite stable. The most recent ten-year means for self-referencing in the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), the *Academy of Management Review* (AMR), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ), *Journal of Applied Psychology* (JAP), and *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ) are 9, 6, 9, 13, and 16 percent, respectively. That is, on average, 9 percent of the references in any paper published in AMJ in the 2001–2010 time period are references to other papers published in AMJ. The standard deviations for these self-reference rates (2001–2010) are all just 1 percent. The stable differences we now see among the journals probably just reflect the importance of the work published by distinguished field journals. One can expect journals like JAP and SMJ, for example, to have higher self-reference rates than the other three, journals whose substantive reach is much broader. Thankfully, there is no obvious support for Monastersky's (2005) self-dealing hypothesis in our field.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting experiment occurred briefly in early 2011. Teppo Felin (Brigham Young University) decided to call on crowdsourcing to establish a measure of journal quality. The link quickly collected thousands of assessments, prompted a lively debate on the Organization and Management Theory listserv, and then mysteriously disappeared. It turned out

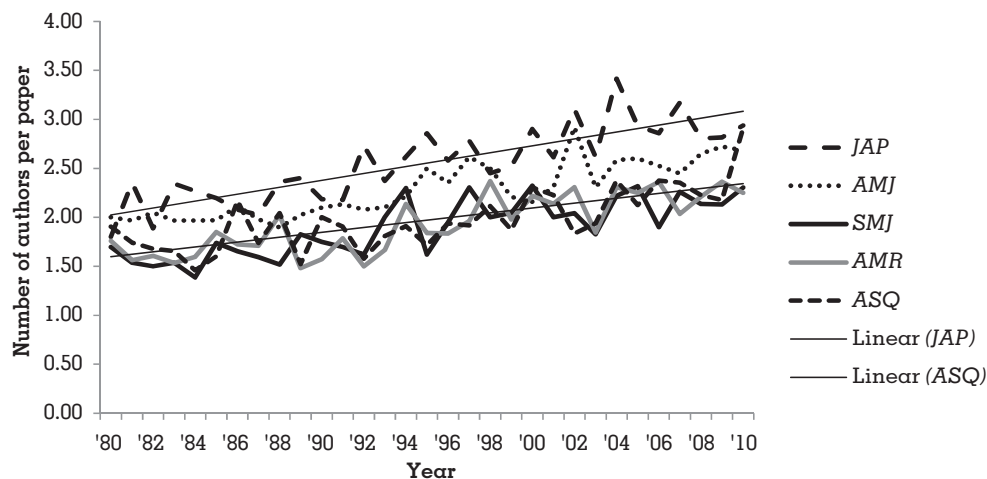
What has all of this done to us? First of all, authors are at risk if they work alone or in pairs, laboring for years to write an influential paper or book. Volume matters. Ambitious scholars need to produce a large volume of research in "A-level" journals, and they need to be recognized for that work if they are to be successful in our audit culture. One can imagine that this would lead to two complementary strategies. First, we might expect to see a rise in what might be called "team production." That is, people might work in larger groups, each contributing a bit to a variety of projects so as to maximize their total number of publications.<sup>4</sup> The evidence suggests that this is happening. As we

that someone created an automatic script to robo-vote for his or her favorite journals and so corrupted the results. Ultimately, the data were cleaned and the results shared with the Organization and Management Theory division's members (see <http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2011/01/15/management-journal-rankings-crowdsourced/>). With safeguards, we will likely see more use of crowdsourcing in the years ahead.

<sup>4</sup> Bedeian, Taylor, and Miller shared one respondent's observation about this very phenomenon: "Some of our colleagues are forming 'Article Publication Communes' to beat the system. One prominent management researcher had 11 refereed journal articles accepted for publication last year—with 45 co-authors (total count of co-authors including many repeats). This is the most extreme case I've seen so far, but others are doing the same thing on a lesser scale" (2010: 720).



**FIGURE 5**  
**Authors per Paper over Time**



can see in Figure 5, looking at the first four issues of every volume, there has been an increase in the number of authors per paper in *AMJ*, *AMR*, *ASQ*, *JAP*, and *SMJ* since 1980. At *JAP*, for example, an almost 50 percent increase in the number of authors per paper has occurred over the past thirty years.<sup>5</sup> Second, these scholars need to promote their work. Of course, with more coauthors, individuals now have more informal networks to tap, hoping to spread the news of their work and, in so doing, increase their citation counts. But one can also do that directly. One can self-cite.

Collected with help from Thomson Reuters, the data in Figure 6 give us a look at what some might call self-promotion in our field. It shows the percentage of self-citations for every paper's citations in the year following publication. For example, the data for *SMJ*, a journal founded in 1980, tell us that the total number of citations in 1981 for all papers published in *SMJ* in 1980 was six; one of these citations was from a 1980 author, yielding a 1980 one-year self-

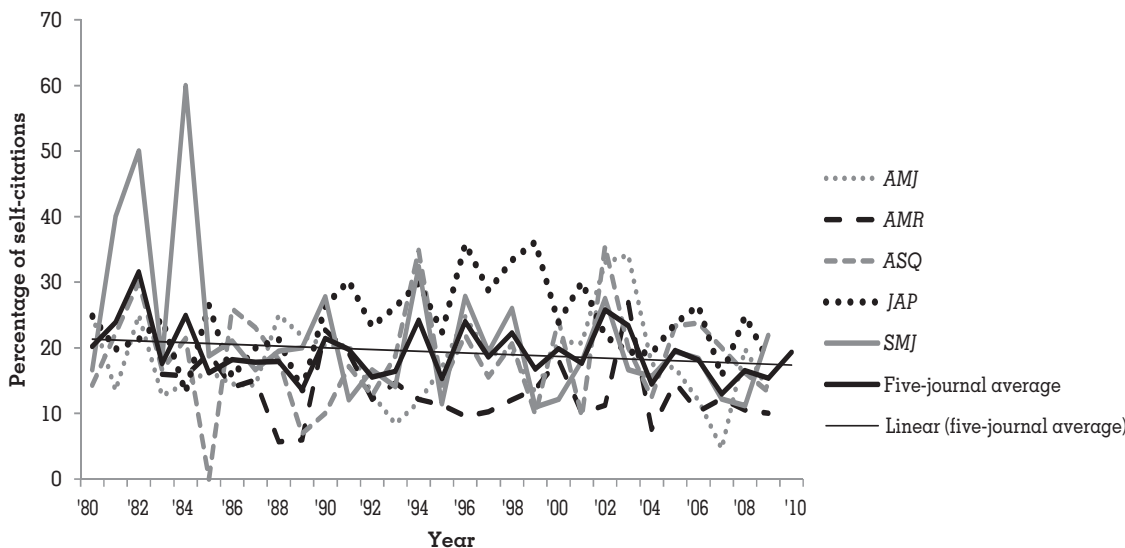
citation rate of 16.7 percent.<sup>6</sup> While the data are noisy, the linear trend shows a slight decline in self-citations over time. Looking across the five journals, we see that the authors in the 1980s accounted for 20.2 percent of their papers' citations in the first year after publication; the figures drop to 19.4 percent for the 1990s authors and then to 18.4 percent for the 2000s authors. While our colleagues are certainly inclined to draw attention to their work, there is no evidence to suggest that they are any more self-promoting today than they were yesterday.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the early volatility for *SMJ* simply reflects the fact that it was building a readership. The ratios of self-citations to total citations for the 1980–1985 papers in that first year after publication were 1/6, 4/10, 5/10, 2/11, 3/5, and 3/16. Of course, with such small numbers, the self-citation percentages range greatly, from 16.7 percent in 1980 to 60 percent in 1984. Relatedly, the papers published in *ASQ* in 1985 received seventeen citations in 1986, none of them from a 1985 author. While the results are mixed, the percentages tied to these small numbers likely contribute to the downward-sloping-trend line we see in the figure. I should also point out that while *AMR* published papers in the 1980–1982 time period, Thomson Reuters does not have the citation data for those years on hand.

<sup>7</sup> I collected the self-citation data as revealed in one-, two-, and three-year postpublication observation windows. Of course, as the citations to the work build, the percentage of self-citations in those longer observation windows will drop. The thirty-year means (standard deviations) for the five journals' self-citation rates were 19.3 (4.2), 14.2 (2.1), and 11.6 (1.8) for those three postpublication windows.

<sup>5</sup> Certo et al. (2010) and Wuchty, Jones, and Uzzi (2007) also documented this same team production phenomenon. In addition, Wuchty et al. (2007) showed us that the citations to the team-produced papers are higher than they are for solo-authored papers. While they netted out self-citations, we do not know if these higher citation counts reflect better work or reciprocal citation practices among those in the authors' networks.

**FIGURE 6**  
Self-Citations in the Year Following Publication



Focusing on team production and self-promotion as I have, I am dismayed to report that my ideas about how scholars might survive life in our audit culture have been limited and maybe even benign. I have some very disquieting news to share. Bedeian et al. (2010) just published a paper that will rock our world. Their survey data tell us that we seem to live in a “win at all costs” culture (see Table 1). The number of colleagues who report witnessing acts of fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism is simply staggering.<sup>8</sup> I am dumbstruck by these results. As I said, the picture of life in our secular world is not pretty.<sup>9</sup>

Some might be tempted to tell me to buck up. They would tell me that life can be hard and that it is not for the faint of heart. Sure, our work may not translate well and, yes, it may be tough to make a life in the organization and management sciences, but our work still proceeds apace. Witness the 10,000 people who traveled

**TABLE 1**  
Win at All Costs? The Bedeian et al. (2010)  
Evidence on Fabrication, Falsification, and  
Plagiarism in Our Field (N = 384)

Behavior	All	Tenured	Nontenured
Withheld methodological details or results	79.2%	79.7%	78.4%
Selected only those data that support a hypothesis and withheld the rest	77.6%	77.9%	77.1%
Used another’s ideas without permission or giving due credit	72.1%	75.3%	67.3%
Dropped observations or data points from analyses based on a gut feeling that they were inaccurate	59.6%	62.3%	55.6%
Withheld data that contradicted their previous research	49.5%	50.6%	47.7%
Fabricated results	26.8%	26.4%	27.5%

<sup>8</sup> It turns out that these practices do not mark us as unique. Similar results have also been reported in the world of science (see De Vries, Anderson, & Martinson, 2006, and Martinson, Anderson, & De Vries, 2005). Lehrer’s (2010) discussion of what he calls “the slipperiness of empiricism” in the *The New Yorker* magazine brought these kinds of issues to the awareness of the general public. His discussion of the decline effect and its possible origins in significance chasing, the selective reporting of results, and publication bias is well worth a read (so, too, is a paper by Ioannidis [2005] that he flagged for us).

<sup>9</sup> In this light, I should never have been surprised to read Glick, Miller, and Cardinal’s (2007) sober assessment of life in our field. Looking at still other aspects of what might be called the underside of our world, they concluded, “With randomness and disappointment being central aspects of life in organization science, an assessment of exit strategies should be undertaken at the start of the career” (2007: 830).

to Montréal in 2010 to share their work and learn from each other. Maybe all is (reasonably) well. But maybe not. Have you noticed the soul-searching in our world of late? Noted scholars in our field's four major areas decry the state of research in their subspecialties today. Their observations are as sobering as they are grave. Our science seems to be suffering too.<sup>10</sup>

**Organizational behavior:** "I find myself having to marshal my emotional resources to keep from getting depressed about future prospects for actionable research in organizational behavior" (Hackman, 2011: 105).

**Organization theory:** "Like symphony orchestras that play a repertoire of a dozen baroque and classical composers year in and year out, organizational research can sometimes appear like a living museum of the 1970s" (Davis, 2010: 691).

**Strategy:** "Our field is rapidly being pulled apart by centrifugal forces. Like a supernova that once packed a wallop, our energy is now dissipating and we are quickly growing cold" (Hambrick, 2004: 91).

**Human resource management:** "We believe it is time for a serious discussion about whether the academic marketplace for ideas is producing an optimal solution with respect to academic HR research" (Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007: 1001).

And, back to the beginning, how are our business schools faring in this unprecedented time of opportunity? The answer? Not well. A cottage industry of business school critics has emerged in recent years. Mintzberg (1996, 2004), Pfeffer and Fong (2002, 2004), Mitroff (2004), Bennis and O'Toole (2005), Ghoshal (2005), Khurana (2007), Moldoveanu and Martin (2008), Podolny (2009), and Datar, Garvin, and Cullen (2010), to name a few, have either directly criticized or summa-

rized the many criticisms of business schools. Podolny's words are chilling: "Fact is, so deep and widespread are the problems afflicting management education that some people have come to believe that business schools are harmful to society, fostering self-interested, unethical, and even illegal behavior among their graduates" (2009: 63).<sup>11</sup> But are we really surprised? Our own self-interested and apparently unethical behavior may spawn the kinds of self-interested and unethical behavior that seem to mark some of our graduates. It's sad that our students appear to be more attracted to the quality of our placement offices than they are to what we teach in our classrooms (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008).

### EMBRACING THE SACRED

All of this has been hard for me to report. I am not, by nature, a pessimist. Depending on how you count, I have been in our field for thirty years. It may very well be my blinders and my choice of friends, but I generally do not see this kind of behavior. In fact, I am deeply inspired by many people in our field. I think I know that there is another side to life in our world, the sacred side.<sup>12</sup> And, so, I decided to try to find it.

I asked the 200 plus people who attended the 2009 New Doctoral Student Consortium in Chicago (226 signed up to attend) why they wanted to be scholars (thinking of scholarship in Boyer's [1990] broad terms of discovery, integration, application, and teaching). I then asked that same

<sup>10</sup> Relatedly, Starbuck (2005) and Singh, Haddad, and Chow (2007) investigated whether or not our "top" journals seem to be producing the field's most valuable research. Not surprisingly, being published in our cherished "top" journals is no guarantee of subsequent influence. Starbuck clearly warned us of confusing the two: "If publication in high-status journals leads social scientists to adopt less valuable articles as exemplars, mediocre articles are exerting as much or more influence on scientific values as are excellent articles" (2005: 197). Taking a different approach to this same question about the state of our science, Hambrick warned us that "we have gone overboard in our obsession with theory" (2007: 1346). He worried about the costs to our field if we continue to insist that every paper make a significant contribution to theory.

<sup>11</sup> Leavitt (1989) foreshadowed these words over twenty years ago. He criticized the state of MBA education at the time and colorfully argued that our heavy focus on business analytics was turning our promising MBA students into "critters with lopsided brains, icy hearts and shrunken souls" (1989: 39). Fifteen years later, Mitroff wrote an angry open letter to the deans and faculty of U.S. business schools, arguing that "unless we finally own up to the underlying reasons for our actions, business schools will only continue to aid and abet the wave of scandals that have engulfed American business within the last few years" (2004: 185). And, the following year, Ghoshal famously argued that "bad management theories are, at present, destroying good management practices" (2005: 86).

<sup>12</sup> When I think of the meaning of the word "sacred" here, I think of Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, and Lerner's definition: "A sacred value can be defined as any value that a moral community implicitly or explicitly treats as possessing infinite or transcendental significance and that precludes comparison, trade-offs, or indeed any other mingling with bounded or secular values" (2000: 853).



question of the 116 people who attended one of our junior faculty consortia last year and of the Academy's 271 emeritus members. I wanted to capture something of a cross-section of our world. The results might warm your heart (even if the response rate from our early- and late-stage career colleagues does not).

I read and reread the responses and ultimately sorted them into the four overarching categories depicted in Figure 7. Notwithstanding the picture I just painted, in our heart of hearts we are not a calculatingly self-interested group of scholars. Maybe some of us are just trying to survive life under an audit regime. Many of our scholarly motivations are quite virtuous. The following verbatim comments illustrate the logic of the coding scheme.

**Personal fit:**

- "The college campus was the only place I ever felt truly free."
- "... an amazing journey that is filled with inspiration, passion, and joy so powerful that I cannot think of doing anything else as a profession."

**Life of the mind:**

- "I enjoy the moments of insight or incubation when all of a sudden you have an idea that solves a problem that you have been agonizing about for a long time."
- "For the privilege of independence and the opportunity for discovery."

**Serve others:**

- "Because I want to improve the lives of people, whether it is by making organizations

more effective, markets more efficient, or employees more satisfied."

- "I want to help/inspire younger students to be successful at whatever they choose to do in life."
- "I want to leave the world better than I found it."

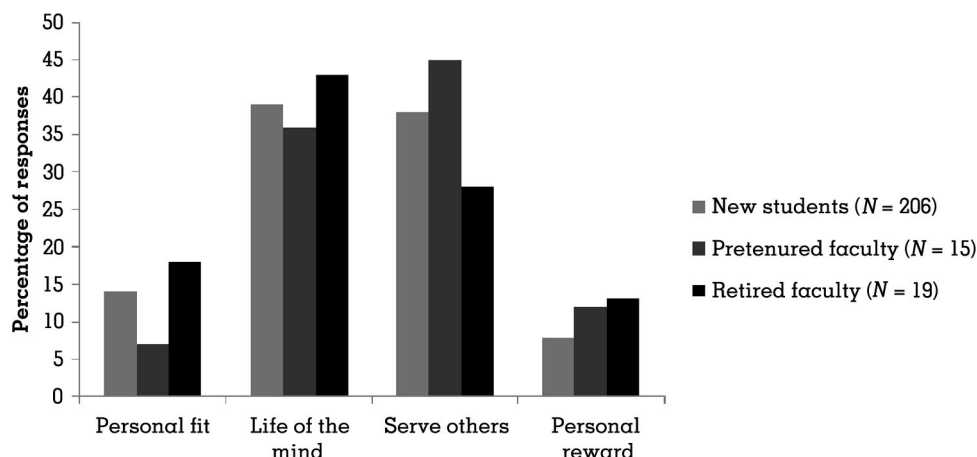
**Personal reward:**

- "Financial stability"
- "I like the lifestyle of professors"

Many of us are drawn to our work—maybe better said as drawn to our calling—by the allure of the life of the mind and for the chance to serve others.

None of this should surprise us. The Academy of Management just completed an exhaustive strategic planning process (<http://strategicplan.aomonline.org/>). Of course, this gave us an opportunity to articulate our vision of the future—a vision remarkably easy to articulate: "We inspire and enable a better world through our scholarship and teaching about management and organizations." This nicely complements March's view of our work: "Higher education is a vision, not a calculation. It is a commitment, not a choice. Students are not customers; they are acolytes. Teaching is not a job; it is a sacrament. Research is not an investment; it is a testament" (2003: 206). The sacred nature of our work is no mystery to anyone. To my knowledge, members of only three professions don robes: the clergy, justices, and professors. The

**FIGURE 7**  
Why Are You a Scholar?



company we keep tells us something about our work and our place in society.<sup>13</sup>

We are motivated by the highest of ideals and yet we conspire to create a solipsistic world for ourselves, one defined by endless quantitative appraisals of our contribution and worth.<sup>14</sup> Why do we do this? Can we stop? The answer can be found with some clear thinking, some imagination, and, ultimately, some courage. As Robert Kennedy said in his introduction to his brother's book, "None of us can afford to be lookers-on, the critics standing on the sidelines" (Kennedy, 2000/1956: ix). It is time for us to better create our own destinies. Let's first take a look at what each of us can do in our worlds of research and teaching. We can then look at what it will take to enable that better world.

### Research

I cannot begin to tell thousands of scholars what to do. If centrifugal forces are tearing us apart, then I can only hope that with time we might find some common ground.<sup>15</sup> But I can ask us to be mindful of the choices we make. As our 2008 program chair, I was able to set the theme for our meeting in Anaheim. I chose the theme "The Questions We Ask" and wrote these words in our conference call:

Let's begin by identifying the questions that define the theoretical and empirical frontiers of our specialties. What puzzles, conundrums, points of confusion, and unanswered questions really be-

<sup>13</sup> I know that some might cry, "Blasphemy!" when they hear me call our work sacred. In addition to the criticisms I've noted from people like Sumantra Ghoshal (2005), there are others in critical management studies (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007) and beyond (Korten, 2001; Parker, 2002) who deeply question our work and the work of those we educate. These challenges remind me of Richard Feynman's discussion of the value of science. He was taken with a proverb he heard in a Buddhist temple: "To every man is given the key to the gates of heaven; the same key opens the gates of hell." Feynman observed that "scientific knowledge is an enabling power to do either good or bad—but it does not carry instruction on how to use it" (1999: 142). Substitute the words "organization and management" for "scientific" and we have an answer to those critics. It is our responsibility to ensure that our knowledge is used for the good. That is a sacred calling.

<sup>14</sup> Adler and Harzing's (2009) award-winning paper is a searing indictment of what the various ranking systems have done to us (mutable as they are; Gladwell, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, after worrying about those centrifugal forces in strategy, Nag, Hambrick, and Chen (2007) went looking for—and found—some ties that bind.

devil you and your close colleagues? Reconnoiter your field of expertise and articulate the unanswered questions. Be sure to consider *the most meaningful* questions. Just because a question has yet to be asked or answered does not mean that we need to address it. Some questions are more important than others (available at [http://meeting.comonline.org/2008/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=1](http://meeting.comonline.org/2008/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=1)).

All I can do right now is to ask us to ask the most important questions. It is up to each of us to define what those important questions are. Let's just not recoil from the challenge and, in the extreme, seek the easy refuge of the "minimum publishable unit" (Woolston, 2001).<sup>16</sup> Our questions set the entire research and teaching agenda and, more than anything else, determine our relevance and impact.

### Teaching

I mentioned our enduring quest for relevance. Taking nothing away from those who long to advise powerful business and government leaders about the important matters of the day, I think we are missing our real opportunity here. We come face to face with our relevance every day in our classrooms.<sup>17</sup> We have the privilege—and, yes, the power—to shape lives, and not just any lives, but the lives of those who will have a large say in how we all will live in the years to come. Broughton captured it best in his memoir of life in the Harvard Business School:

The language, practices, and leadership styles taught in the MBA course affect us all. . . . MBAs determine the lives many of us will lead, the hours we work, the vacations we get, the culture we consume, the health care we receive, and the education provided to our children (2008: 3).

With one in five undergraduate and one in four graduate students now earning a business degree in the United States (I would not be surprised if the numbers are higher elsewhere), we face an unbe-

<sup>16</sup> There may be a role for our most senior colleagues to play here. Perhaps colleagues like the Fellows who were educated in the 1970s can help our more junior colleagues appreciate what it means to ask and answer questions absent the kinds of secular pressures for publication that we see today.

<sup>17</sup> People have been debating our relevance for years. Recent conversations in *AMJ* (see Rynes, 2007a, for an introduction to the "Editor's Forum on Research with Relevance to Practice") and the *Journal of Management Inquiry* (Walsh, Tushman, Kimberly, Starbuck, & Ashford, 2007) provide a comprehensive introduction to these debates.

lievable opportunity—and responsibility—to help shape the nature of the world we will live in. Teaching matters. Our scholarly lives will be filled with purpose, meaning, and contribution if we can inspire our students to make the world a better place and then impart the skills, sensibilities, and wisdom to make it so.

### A Better World

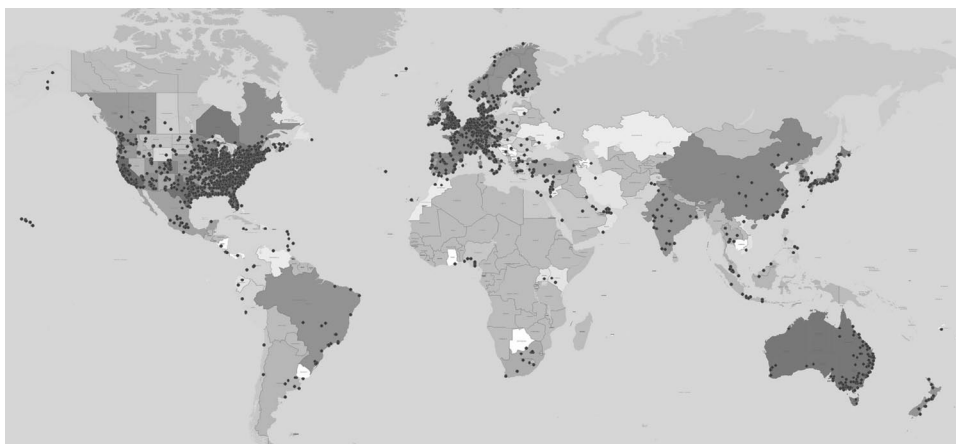
If our vision is to inspire and enable a better world, then it is fair to ask how we are doing. The bleak picture I painted here suggests that we are not doing so well right now. Some may see a brighter future once we start to ask and answer even more important questions and find, in Palmer's (2007) words, "the courage to teach." I am not so sure. Our membership profile may be telling us something different. Perhaps we can do even more. Take a look at where our members live (see Figure 8). Notice anything? Look at where we do not live. Many see the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as the economies that will define much of life on the planet in the coming century. We are scarcely represented there. And look at the changes that are coming. The Indian government, for example, is hoping to create 800 new universities and 35,000 new colleges in the next ten years (*Times of India*, 2010). I dare say that few of us really know what is going on in India.

And what of the economies that struggle more than others? Indonesia, for example, is the fourth most populous nation in the world today (behind China, India, and the United States). They have

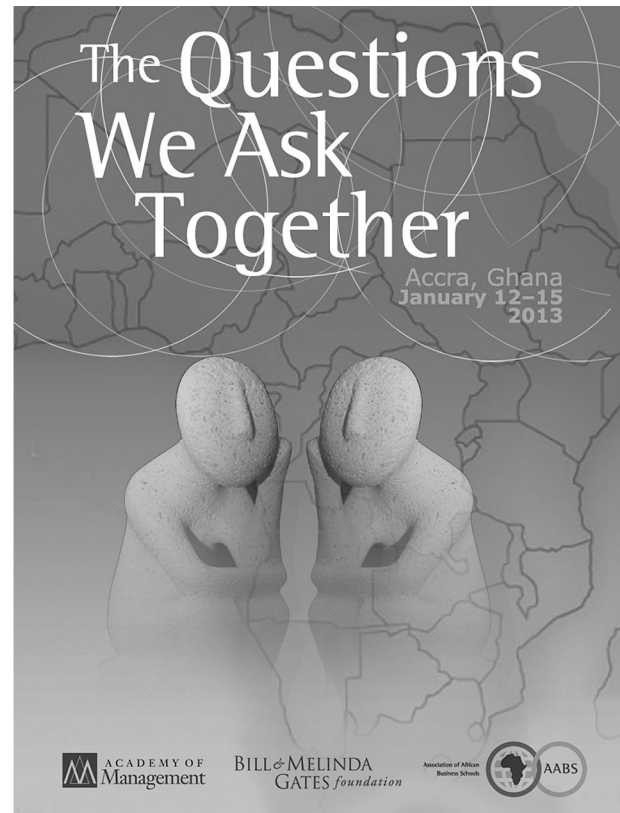
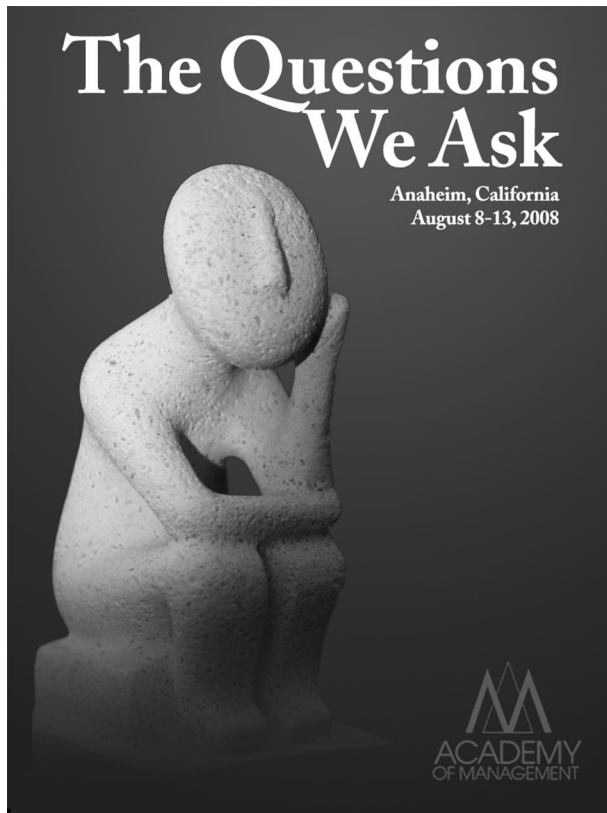
ninety-nine business schools. Few of their professors seem interested in us. Consider Africa. Our colleagues there join together in the Association of African Business Schools, but few of their members seem interested in us either. Counting members from over 100 countries, we in the Academy of Management aim to inspire and enable a better world, and yet we are disconnected from much of the world. What can we do as an Academy to embrace the sacred and inspire and enable that better world? Well, for starters, we can do a better job of engaging the world. And, no, for those quick to criticize such an aspiration, I am not interested in imperialism or colonizing the world in our image. I just want us to learn and to humbly contribute.

As I hope everyone knows by now, the Academy of Management is looking to host what we are now generically calling a "second conference" sometime soon. In addition to meeting every August, the idea is to gather outside the borders of the United States and Canada. Indeed, we recently asked everyone for his or her ideas about what we might do. Let me add one more to the mix. I would love to see us sponsor a conference someday that focused more on asking questions than on answering them, and more on building collaborations than on revealing the fruits of existing ones. And I would like to see us do this in parts of the world where we have little presence and where the challenges are great. Maybe someday we can convince people like Bill and Melinda Gates to help us host a joint conference with the likes of the Association of African Business

**FIGURE 8**  
The Academy of Management's Membership



**FIGURE 9**  
**Academy of Management Conferences: Past and Future?**



Schools in a place like Ghana. That just might start us down a new path toward a better world. Maybe we can have something of a companion event to the one we organized in 2008 (see Figure 9).<sup>18</sup> Instead of gathering to consider the questions we ask, we can gather to discover the questions we might ask together, and then build the capabilities to answer them.

And we don't just need to explore the far reaches of the world to make us and the world better. We only need to look around to fully appreciate the character and contributions of so many of the amazing people in our midst today. I know that if we could get to know each other a little better, we could inspire ourselves to aim higher and reach farther. But with thousands and thousands of Academy members, it is impossible to know what we all are doing. Since I am of a mind to share some new ideas with you, let me leave you

with one more. Maybe we can create a quarterly magazine (or an e-magazine) called the *Academy of Management Today*. Its sole purpose would be to help us tell each other our stories. Figure 10 captures what I have in mind for this publication. Take a look at the kinds of articles we might read about each other. We can use the *Academy of Management Today* to explore these kinds of subjects and so many more. I know that we could easily fill the pages of such a publication with inspiring stories of aspiration, commitment, and integrity. The return on such an investment would be enormous.

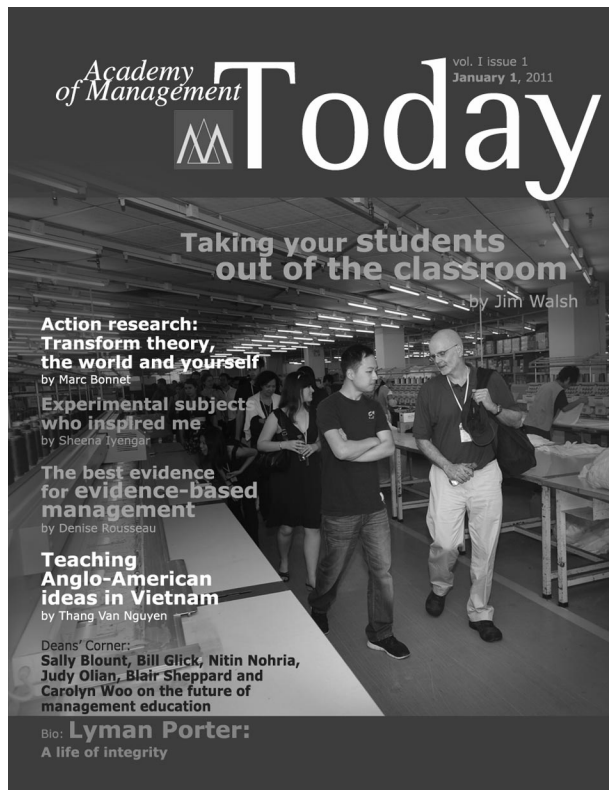
### The Courage to Lead in the University

I said that some of us are going to have to step up and reveal some courage if we are to embrace the sacred in our secular world. But, so far, nothing that I have said seems to call for a dose of courage. Yes, it can be hard to ask and answer the most important questions of the day, and, yes, it can be hard to teach with integrity,

<sup>18</sup> Note that Bill and Melinda Gates, the Association of African Business Schools, and the people of Ghana have never heard these dreams and aspirations of mine.



**FIGURE 10**  
**A New Quarterly Magazine? The Academy of Management Today**



but to do so only asks us to roll up our sleeves and work with maybe even greater commitment. I think we need to do much more.

Let me begin by talking to my tenured senior faculty colleagues. We need to step up in two arenas. First, we need to take a careful look at our promotion and tenure practices. I fear that too many of us are tempted to simply fill in the spreadsheet depicted in Figure 11 when it comes time to grant someone tenure. Assuming at least a serviceable teaching record, we are too often tempted to simply compare our candidate's "A-level" publication and citation record to an assortment of his or her peers in our peer schools; discuss whether or not we will promote someone who resides at the top, median, or bottom of that distribution; and make our decision. I understand that there is some value in compiling a comparative assessment of a person's record, but there is so much more to a colleague than this spreadsheet reveals. Our junior colleagues should be free to publish whatever and wherever they want, without presumptive penalty. Promotion and ten-

ure decisions should rest on an appreciation for a body of work that might be revealed in books, articles, book chapters, simulations, cases, and, who knows, maybe even movies and more. The key is to appreciate the import of the questions asked and the quality of the answers offered.

The quality of our colleague's teaching should be appreciated for the extent to which he or she transforms lives, not by a course evaluation score. There is so much more to teaching excellence than a summary answer to the evaluation question we ask our students at the close of a course (i.e., "Please rate the overall quality of the instructor's job in teaching this course"). Teaching evaluations offer a window on teaching excellence, but we are going to have to sit in our colleagues' classes and talk to students, current and former, to gain a better appreciation for what goes on in those classrooms.

These personnel decisions are going to call upon us to exercise some wisdom and judgment and, yes, even courage. It may be that we will tenure people with less than a voluminous publication record and sky-high teaching evaluations. Maybe even more courageously, we might deny a promotion to someone with such a record but without a record of deep accomplishment and absent a contagious curiosity and passion to look around corners and over the horizon for ways to contribute.<sup>19</sup>

Second, we need to pay attention to how we evaluate our senior colleagues. I cannot speak for all universities, but I fear that too many evaluate their faculty's performance on an annual basis. Rynes observed that "our emphasis is on 'hits,' almost as if we were employed by the Soprano School of Management" (2007b: 1052).<sup>20</sup> Do we really want to put our senior colleagues on a tread-

<sup>19</sup> The former dean of Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and his colleague recently articulated this same sentiment: "While vigorous academic production remains an important marker, true thought leadership demands greater vision and effort. . . . If quantity were all that mattered, an author such as J. D. Salinger would long ago have been forgotten" (Jain & Golosinski, 2009: 103).

<sup>20</sup> The evidence on whether or not the production of "A-hits" will lift the Soprano School of Management to the top of the rankings is equivocal. Some see evidence that the rankings respond to such production (Mitra & Golder, 2008) and some do not (Trieschmann, Dennis, Northcraft, & Niemi, 2000). Moreover, the evidence suggests that such publications have a quadratic effect on the future wealth of MBA graduates. Publications benefit them to a limit whereupon an "excessive" number of



**FIGURE 11**  
**The Logic of Tenure?**

Name 1	Peer School	Ph.D. Year	Ph.D. Institution	Faculty Title	Tenured? Yes/No	Research Awards	Number of "A-Hits"	Total Citations	#1 Paper's Citations	Course Evaluations: Mean/SD
Peer 1										
Peer 2										
Peer 3										
Peer 4										
Peer 5										
Peer 6										
Peer 7										
Candidate										
Peer 8										
Peer 9										
Peer 10										
Peer 11										
Peer 12										
Peer 13										
Peer 14										
Peer 15										

mill where they need to produce "A-hits" year in and year out in order to hold their heads high, much less receive a raise? Why don't we evaluate our tenured colleagues' contributions with three-, four-, or five-year time horizons? Let them set their ambitions for those years in a conversation with their deans and then look at how well they met those aspirations when the time comes. That would go a long way toward building a culture that sustains us rather than constrains us.

If we want people to embrace the sacred in their research and teaching, then we had better be sure to create a control system that will reward them for it. Our tenured faculty members need to create a world that enables this to happen. The old aphorism "What gets measured gets attention and what gets rewarded gets done" is as perceptive as it is true. Changing our control system will take some courage (even with the protection and security of tenure). Absent such a change, this talk of asking and answering important questions and teaching for transformation will just lead to another compelling case study of "the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B" (Kerr, 1975).<sup>21</sup>

publications seem to bode ill for them (O'Brien, Drnevich, Crook, & Armstrong, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Reading March (2003), we can imagine the courage it will take to stand up to the calculative and consequentialist forces that shape our world. Kirp (2003) describes those forces in detail. Simon and Banchemo (2010) give us an alarm-

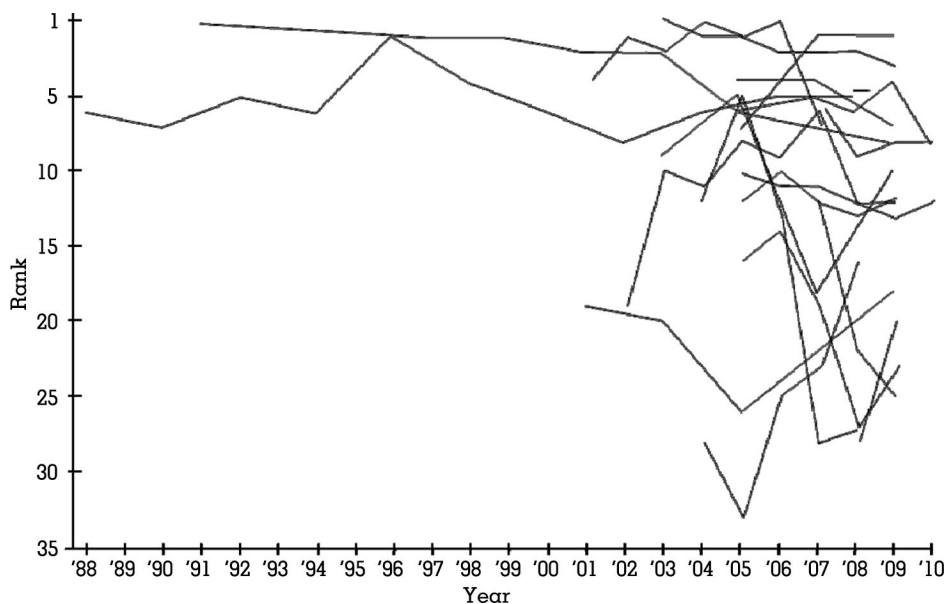
### The Courage to Lead the University in Society

And then there is society at large. For some reason I see far too many lookers-on as critics assail us for what we do and do not do in our business schools. No one is telling our story in the public square. Many of our members are business school deans. Surely some of them have a compelling story to tell about how their students, faculty, and alumni inspire and enable a better world. Why are they all so quiet?<sup>22</sup>

ing look at what may come next. And Head's (2011) review of three new books on this subject will frighten many readers.

<sup>22</sup> Deans may pay a personal price for their silence. Looking at dean turnover in sixty schools in the 1992–2002 time period, Fee, Hadlock, and Pierce (2005) showed us that deans are vulnerable to changes in *Business Week* rankings (but not to *U.S. News & World Report* rankings). Knowing that the upper reaches of the *Business Week* survey (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008) and the *Financial Times* survey (Devinney, Dowling, & Perm-Ajchariyawong, 2008) are largely the sole province of those who inhabit that world, I decided to picture the changes in the deans' offices in the twenty-two years before and after *Business Week* started to rank our schools. Appendix B illustrates our deans' careers in the top ten rank-ordered schools (based on the average of every *Business Week* MBA ranking between 1988 and 2008) and compares them with the careers of those leading schools on the cusp of the very top of those rankings (ranked 21 to 30 in the 2008 evaluation). Each row of continuous shading represents the tenure of a particular dean. The results are striking. If you lead a top ten business school, the rankings do not much affect your career prospects. Thirty-six deans led these

**FIGURE 12**  
**Signals and Noise: Rating and Ranking Michigan's Ross School of Business<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> This figure depicts the assessments made by The Aspen Institute (MBA ranking), *Business Week* (BBA, MBA, EMBA, EE open, and EE custom program rankings), *The Economist* (United States and world MBA rankings), the *Financial Times* (United States and world MBA rankings, as well as EMBA, EE open, and EE custom program rankings), *Forbes* (MBA ranking), *U.S. News & World Report* (BBA, MBA, and EMBA program rankings), and the *Wall Street Journal* (MBA and EMBA program rankings).

And why are our senior faculty colleagues in these schools so quiet? Many speak up about our limitations and problems, but few speak of our strengths and promise. We could use some inspired leadership in our profession.

I began my remarks by saying that we live in an audit culture, one born of a deep interest in what we do. Society cares deeply about how we actually inspire and enable a better world. The prob-

schools before *Business Week* posted its first ranking, and thirty-four led them after. But the recent story is not a happy one for those who aspire to win this race to the top. Akin to the top schools, thirty-seven deans led those Number 21 to Number 30 schools in the years before *Business Week*, but once the school rankings started, that number jumped to fifty (a 35 percent increase). Sadly, deans seem to be replaced in a futile quest to reach the top. Yale reached Number 14 in the 2002 ranking; that is the highest ranking that any of those ten schools received in that twenty-two-year time period. Sauder and Espeland note that "schools on the cusp of tiers or schools with closely ranked peers nearby will feel strong pressure to improve rankings because the statistically meaningless differences that separate schools can matter enormously" (2009: 78). These discarded deans carry and illustrate that pressure. That said, I was heartened to hear three of our colleagues speak up recently on the radio (<http://www.onpointradio.org/2010/10/business-school-deans-future>).

lem is that society does not know exactly how to appraise our work. All of those rating and ranking schemes reflect earnest attempts to make sense of what we do, but they do not really know what they are looking for. Figure 12 reveals the problem. This is what the outside world thinks of my home institution, Michigan's Ross School of Business (as of July 2010). I know that this indecipherable figure looks like a plate of spaghetti. That is the point. What signal emerges from this noise?<sup>23</sup> People do not know if we are the Number 1, the Number 33, or the Number "everything-in-between" business school in the world. But I do know—now in my twentieth year in Ann Arbor, I know for a fact that we are a very special place.

The relentless rating and ranking of our work and, even more particularly, our schools' attempts to shine in these appraisals, distracts us from the real work of scholarship. We have knowledge to discern, students to teach, and organizations to improve. If we continue to distract ourselves with these counts, we risk squandering the privilege this Golden Age grants us.

<sup>23</sup> See Dichev (1999, 2008) for a discussion of this noise.

### A Favor from Our Auditors

While this address is delivered to my colleagues, I cannot resist asking for a favor from those who support and calibrate our external audit culture. They need to help us make better sense of their work. The likes of The Aspen Institute, *Business Week*, *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, *Forbes*, and *U.S. News & World Report* would do us—and the world—a huge favor if they fully revealed their data about us. Journalists and NGOs work hard to reveal the facts and to hold powerful parties accountable. The problem is that while their simple ordinal rankings titillate, they obscure so much more than they reveal. Publishing the rankings—but not the data that lie behind them—does not serve anyone well. I understand that these organizations have their objectives to serve, whether to sell magazines or promulgate their values, but it does not seem impertinent to ask them to be as transparent and accountable as they ask us to be. Doing so will really help us improve the education we offer our students. Moreover, our potential students, recruiters, and alumni—those who use this information to decide where to apply, where to recruit, and whether or not to support their alma mater—will make their decisions with much more accurate information than they do today. I ask that these organizations temper their self-interest a bit and fully disclose their methodologies, their data (past and present), and the benefits they receive for

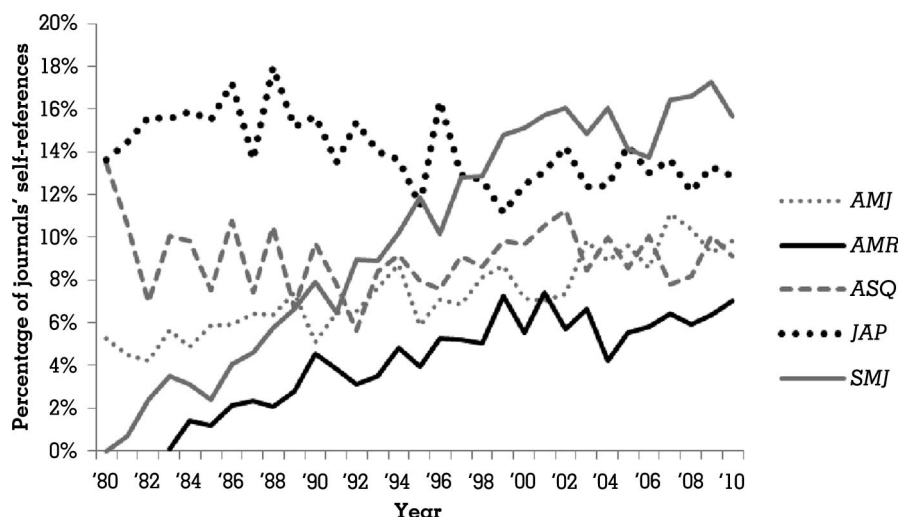
ranking us. The stakes are too high to do otherwise.<sup>24</sup> If they truly want to encourage us to do a better job, then they will share the details of what they know about us and how they know it. Let's work together to make business education better.

### THE GOLDEN AGE IS WITHIN OUR GRASP

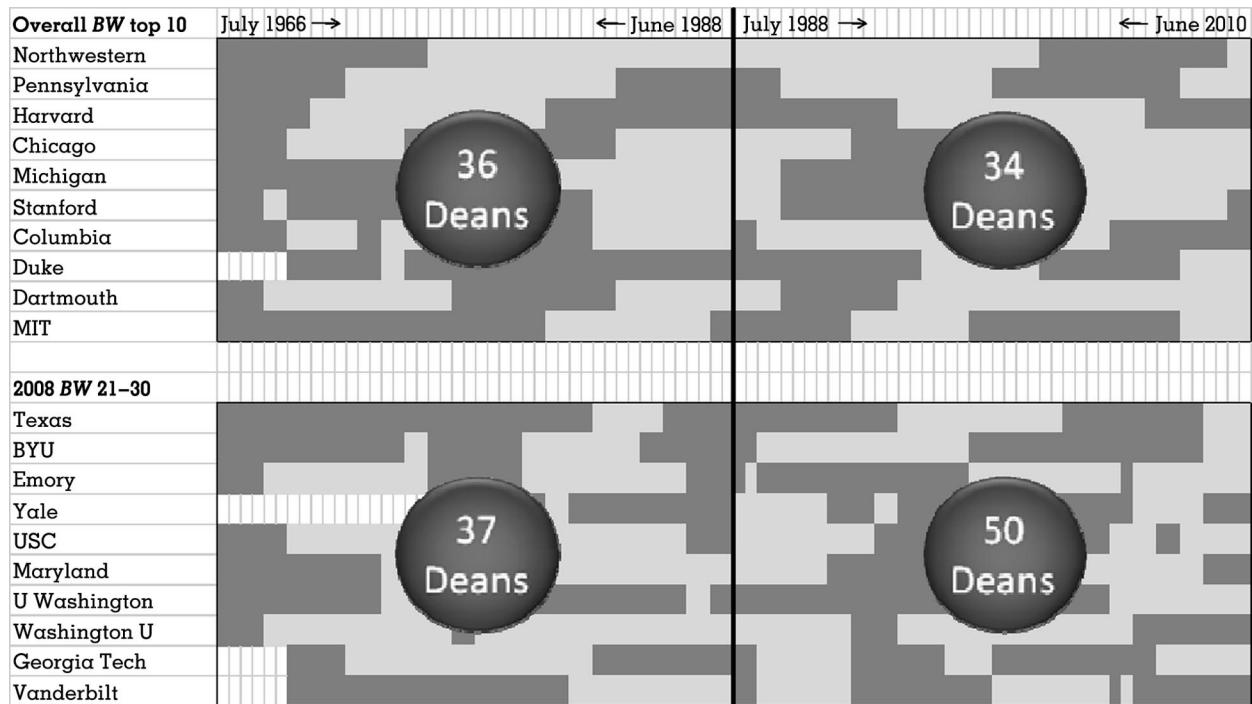
Even after painting a bleak picture of our secular world, I remain optimistic. Our noble aspirations and shared values can lead us to a higher path. They must. The world needs our wisdom about organizations and their management. At the end of the day, I am confident that our Golden Age is near. Led by an inspired set of colleagues, a dedicated group of Academy volunteers and staff, and some courageous senior faculty members, I know that our best days lie just ahead. It is up to us to make this Golden Age a reality. Will you join me in making it so?

<sup>24</sup> In addition to the work that I have already cited, many others have tried to discern how these rankings affect life in business schools (see Corley & Gioia, 2000; DeNisi, 2008; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Glick, 2008; Hopwood, 2008; Martins, 2005; Mau & Mansilya-Kruz, 2008; Segev, Raveh, & Farjoun, 1999; Wedlin, 2006, 2007; Zemsky, 2008). See Caron and Gely (2006) for an introduction to a symposium issue of the *Indiana Law Journal*, a very interesting issue that considers the impact of rankings on legal education.

APPENDIX A  
Self-Referencing in Organization and Management Journals



**APPENDIX B**  
**Dean Service Before and After the Business Week Rankings**



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