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## POWER, POWERLESSNESS, AND JOURNAL RANKING LISTS: THE MARGINALIZATION OF FIELDS OF PRACTICE

VALERIE ANDERSON  
University of Portsmouth

CAROLE ELLIOTT  
Roehampton University Business School

JAMIE L. CALLAHAN  
Newcastle Business School

**This essay contributes a new perspective to debates about journal ranking lists and their effects on the practice of scholarship. Our argument is grounded in practice theory and draws on Bourdieu’s concept of field. We examine the effect of metrics, targets, and rankings on human resource development, a conjunctive field associated with the management learning and education (MLE) field. We examine the ways in which boundaries of the MLE field are shaped by journal ranking lists and how, irrespective of seniority in the field, scholars simultaneously experience both power and powerlessness as a result of journal ranking processes. We contribute a new perspective on issues of academic practice with consequences for specialized areas of scholarship. We conclude by proposing practical interventions that senior scholars and journal editors can undertake to challenge the undesirable effects of ranking systems and encourage scholarly diversity.**

Management learning and education (MLE) is an important interdisciplinary field with roots in the sharing of pedagogical activities that facilitate the transfer of knowledge from educators to students (Gallos, 2008). MLE’s growth from the “poor step-child” (Gallos, 2008: 539) of “the academy” has been shaped by developments in management knowledge, technological changes, and recognition of the importance of effective management education (Lewicki, 2002). These shifts have led to an increase in publication outlets for MLE scholars and recognition of MLE as a legitimate research field (Currie & Pandher, 2013).

One mechanism used as a proxy for legitimation of a field is the position of publication outlets for the field within journal ranking lists. Journal ranking lists are ubiquitous, and our essay examines their effect on the MLE field. We contribute to debates about the utility and efficacy of journal ranking lists in three ways. First, using a Bourdieusian conceptualization (Bourdieu, 1989, 1990), we examine the effect of journal ranking lists on the MLE field.

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Second, using our own field of human resource development (HRD) as an exemplar, we identify how ranking lists act as a “cloak of invisibility” for scholarship in applied disciplines. Third, in relation to the scholarship of management more widely, we contribute a new perspective about the effect of ranking lists, which we conceptualize as a condition for change in the MLE and HRD fields of scholarship.

Our essay is constructed as follows. First, we delineate the field of HRD as one related to MLE (with both being situated within a broader field of scholarship), identifying shared, as well as distinctive, features of their roots and their contribution to the social sciences. We then establish the context and scholarly basis for the specific questions we address. Drawing on the theorization of Bourdieu (1989, 1990), we argue that academics work in fields of practice, some of which are characterized by struggles for legitimacy in relation to each other (e.g., the relationship between the subfields of HRD and MLE). We then examine the effects of journal ranking lists on academic practice in general, and on scholarship in our focal subfield of HRD in particular. We further consider the implications of our analysis for HRD and MLE researchers, journal editors and publishers, and those in positions of leadership in the field.

In submitting our work to this highly regarded journal, we are conscious that we are complicit in the process about which we direct our critique. However, in speaking to those who hold power and are powerful (AMLE editors and the Academy of Management) we seek to give voice to those with less power. Our essay is grounded in a commitment to increase recognition of power relations that limit individual agency (Ross, Nichol, Elliott, Sambrook, & Stewart, 2019). We aim to reveal a plurality of interests for scholars and practitioners, to raise awareness among the powerful regarding who benefits and loses from publishing practices. We argue that in the HRD and MLE fields, high-quality research generates evidence and theorization that is robust, ethical, stands up to scrutiny and is relevant to, and informed by, developments in applied practice-orientated situations. Therefore, we conclude with a call to action for academic practitioners to initiate new practices to challenge the limiting effect of journal ranking lists and encourage intellectual pluralism, curiosity, and flexibility in order to impact both theory and practice in the MLE and HRD fields.

### HRD AND MLE

In spite of definitional debates concerning the boundaries and relationships between professional and disciplinary areas, the relationship between HRD and MLE remains unclear. HRD has been characterized as “a field in search of itself” (Chalofsky, 1992: 175), a search that is illustrated through numerous scholarly exchanges in the late 1990s and early 2000s aimed at defining HRD as a professional area of activity (Ruona, 2016). We contend that HRD represents an applied domain that is related to, and conjunctive with, the field of MLE scholarship and practice. HRD scholarship and practice is focused on three principal constructs: people, learning, and organizations (Sambrook & Willmott, 2014). It is enacted through practices that include learning, training, and development; adult and vocational education; and management learning and organizational development (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). In part, the lack of attention to the relationship between HRD and MLE may be explained by the focus of HRD scholars in the United Kingdom on the relationship between HRM and HRD and its relevance for organizational performance (Woodall, 2003). In the United Kingdom and mainland Europe, HRD is largely taught and researched in business schools; in North America, by contrast, it is predominantly taught

and researched in departments of adult and continuing education (Kuchinke, 2002).

Regardless of these different contexts, HRD, like MLE, is concerned with management-level learning, development, and education. Both fields share many other characteristics. First, HRD and MLE scholars have acknowledged their continuing interdisciplinary foundations and their contribution to theory and practice in a range of organizational contexts (Chalofsky, 2007; Lewicki, 2013; McGuire, 2014; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002). Second, both fields share a historical foundation from, and concern for, the application of scholarship in organizational contexts. For example, the journal *Management Learning*, which has been described as a “nascent publication for a trade association focussing on applied research” (James & Denyer, 2009: 363), was known as *Management Education and Development* from 1970 to 1995. In 1995, however, scholars made a deliberate shift toward developing an international academic journal, and links with the U.K.-based Association for Management Education and Development were broken (Vince & Elkjaer, 2009). A consequence of this shift was the relative decline in practice-led, collaborative research, and the encouragement of theoretically and critically driven scholarship in the MLE field in the United Kingdom (James & Denyer, 2009). Similarly, AMLE’s principal tie is to the Academy of Management. AMLE’s mission, since it was established in 2002, is to publish “high-quality scholarship,” and its intended audience is “scholars, educators, program directors, and deans at academic institutions, as well as practitioners in training, development and corporate education” (Lewicki, 2002: 8).

With a similar historical context to that of the MLE field, the origins of the HRD field lie in adult and vocational training and education and the continuing professional development of practitioners of training, learning, and development. In the United Kingdom, the concern for continuing professional development of HRD practitioners led to the formation of a European scholarly body for HRD (The University Forum for HRD). In the United States, the Academy of Human Resource Development developed from the practitioner body now known as the Association for Talent Development.

As a specialist field, HRD has been described as holding a “paradoxical position of primacy and subordination in relation to management education” (Sambrook & Willmott, 2014: 50). Both fields share a focus on matters of education and learning in organizational settings but experience different levels of

recognition within the wider scholarly field. For example, the work published in this journal by Currie and Pandher (2013) proposed a ranking of 84 journals in the MLE field but omitted HRD journals. As scholars whose practice identifies with the field of HRD, we regard this as evidence of “hierarchical power differentials between MLE and HRD” (Sambrook & Willmott, 2014: 51). We contend that our field can, and does, offer a unique contribution to knowledge that is equally relevant to that of the MLE field. We further argue that the lack of interaction between MLE and HRD subfields limits knowledge generation about learning, development, and education, to the disadvantage of scholars in both. For example, HRD scholars examine inequalities of learning experiences and opportunities at work in relation to gender, race, and professional (management) identity—issues also pertinent to MLE. In addition, HRD scholarship provides a fertile “space” from which critical voices can raise questions and problems that reflect the experience and context of those who operate at levels of organizational hierarchy that remain underrepresented in knowledge generated about executive-level learning and education.

Our positional point of identity is as scholars within the field of HRD who have also served as editors-in-chief of three different HRD journals. Our starting point is the omission of HRD journals from the MLE rankings compiled by Currie and Pandher (2013). Our motivation is to examine the contribution of HRD as conjunctive to the MLE field of scholarship. Field theory examines relations at the meso level between actors who consider each other in relation to “the shared stakes of a field” (Krause, 2018: 5). It affords us the opportunity to inquire about the symbolic role that capital from other contexts—for example, the fields of international publishing and bibliometrics—plays in shaping relations within fields. We aim to explain why, and how, journal ranking processes marginalize, or render almost invisible, related fields such as HRD.

The logics of rankings, and their consequences for academic practice in general, have been widely debated in the literature. However, our position as HRD scholars with a background in journal editorship leads us to question whether the issues for specialized fields are sufficiently understood. Our concern here is to critically examine the effect of journal ranking lists on the activity in practice of scholars in the specialist fields of HRD and MLE. However, we contend that the issues we address are likely to be pertinent to other specialist or applied fields. Therefore, although our concern is with the HRD

field, we argue that our field may not be the only one affected in this way by journal ranking lists.

### THEORETICAL CONTEXT: ACADEMIC PRACTICE

In this section of our essay we discuss the Bourdieusian theoretical grounding of our approach (Bourdieu, 1989, 1990). We argue that academics work in fields of scholarly practice, some of which may be nested in or (as in the case of HRD associated with MLE) conjunctive to others, which are informed by field-specific norms that influence behavior in complex ways. These nested or conjunctive fields are niche within the social science disciplines; as such, they are deemed subfields because of their specialist focus. Discussing the context of academic practice as a form of professional work and labor enables us to contribute a novel and provocative insight into the effects of journal ranking lists on the specialized subfield of HRD and on the related subfield of MLE.

Although a practice perspective features as part of many theoretical traditions (see, e.g., Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984, 1991), we draw principally on Bourdieu’s (1989, 1990) theory of practice, particularly his interpretations of the mobilization of symbolic violence in the Academy (Bourdieu, 1988)—that is, how individuals misrecognize and impose arbitrary power relations. This work provides a basis for understanding both the agency of (academic) actors and the workings of the systemic context in which scholarly work occurs. We use Bourdieu’s socio-analytical tools to examine the invisible structures within which the MLE and HRD fields operate to locate and examine journal ranking lists as a form of “hidden determinism” (Wacquant, 1990: 687) through which symbolic capital is unequally distributed. In our focus on journal ranking lists as a symbolic system of classification we consider their reproductive and reinforcing effect on power relations within the Academy as a whole, and within the fields of HRD and MLE specifically. On the basis of our Bourdieusian framing we also identify lines of tension engendered by journal ranking lists as features of symbolic power relations, and identify conditions for change in our field of scholarship that might be exploited to positively impact both HRD and MLE theorization and practice.

Bourdieu’s (1988) concept of “field of practice” is particularly appropriate to analyze the work of scholarship that takes place in universities, and the role of institutionalized cultural and symbolic capitals in the unfolding of social stratification between

academic fields. As a field, “the academy” is well-bounded—encompassing the practice of university management, leadership, and administration (whose incumbents also frequently self-identify as scholars), as well as those who practice as journal editors, researchers, teachers, and students. All those within the scholarly field of practice have experienced similar, but subtly different, socialization processes. We contend that these processes, generally referred to as academic formation, reproduce structures of dominance through the relational distribution of power between academic fields (Bourdieu, 1988; Wacquant, 1990).

Bourdieu describes a field as an arena where activity is carried out according to accepted norms and rules, and where the activities are different to those carried out in subfields or in an alternative “adjacent” space (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Joy, Game, & Toshniwal, 2018). Fields of practice (and their component subfields) have their own implicit and explicit rules that may reinforce or contradict each other. These norms affect individual agency and practice in complex ways, and are important for interactional and power relations. Fields are relatively autonomous, but Bourdieu’s conceptualization of “field” indicates that some members will accrue relative advantage from the “rules of the game” as they contest for specific types of symbolic capital (Krause, 2018). Therefore, interactions, transactions, and events that occur within fields have consequences for different interest groups, and Bourdieu’s work suggests “a certain pattern of symbolic differentiation among positions in the field” (Krause, 2018: 6).

Cooperative practice among interest groups within fields is maintained through implicit “codes of civility” (Callahan, 2011). In academic fields, these codes of civility have an important effect on the outlook, assumptions, and practices of individuals. They underpin specific and distinctive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Bourdieu’s conceptualization further suggests that these field-specific dispositions and behaviors reinforce hierarchies and maintain the interests of some players in the field at the expense of others. For example, the set of objective relations that exist between different disciplines in the field of the university is a center of struggle between disciplines in the distribution of symbolic capital resources.

Analyzing the relational distribution of professors in France according to their social origins and access to forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, for example, allowed Bourdieu to identify how the structure of the dominant group is reproduced. Building on this logic, business schools may be understood as having achieved a “temporal

dominance” (Wacquant, 1990: 280) with a power-base grounded in academic capital. The power of “culturally autonomous” (Wacquant, 1990: 280) disciplines, such as the natural sciences, by contrast, is based on intellectual capital. The position between these two poles of power mirrors that between the two principal elements of dominant social groups and stakeholders. On the one side sit stakeholder representatives of economic and political capital, such as business executives and government officials; on the other side sit those who derive power from their symbolic and cultural capital, including intellectuals and artists. Located at the midway point between these two extremes are social science and humanities disciplines, which are “internally organized around the clash between socio-political and scientific authority” (Wacquant, 1990: 680).

Bourdieu’s (1989) associated concept of habitus is also relevant to analysis of the scholarly field of practice. Habitus explains how implicit assumptions, engendered through educational and professional background, are acquired and sustained through imitation and role modeling. In the scholarly field of practice, as we have argued above, academic formation (through socialization and role modeling) explains the resilience of “rules” and networks of relationships, status distinctions, and hierarchies that legitimize and sustain inequalities of gender, race, and class (Özbilgin, 2009).

Thus, drawing on Bourdieu’s conceptualization of fields of practice we consider academic practice itself as occurring within a social space with its own social structures and actor positions. We contend that within the scholarly field of practice taken as a whole, both HRD and MLE are related, or conjunctive, subfields of research and study. Both draw on theories and methodologies from a variety of mostly social science-related disciplines—principally sociology, education, economics, and psychology within the scholarly field of practice associated with learning and organizations taken as a whole. We do not refer to either HRD or to MLE as an academic discipline per se, but note that both areas of scholarship and study are interdisciplinary, applied, and problem-related. Consequently, we claim that HRD is a subfield or area of scholarship that is related to the MLE subfield. The distinction we draw, of access to capital based on relative positional power, plays a role in our analysis of MLE and HRD. The dual location of the HRD subfield between the temporally dominant capital of business schools in the United Kingdom and the different capital resources of education schools in the United States dilutes its status. On the other hand, the MLE subfield has a more

consistent connection to business schools and their temporal dominance afforded by their association with economic capital enabling consolidation of symbolic capital. As a result, HRD carries less power than MLE within the field of scholarship concerned with learning and development in organizational contexts.

### THE UBIQUITOUS INFLUENCE OF JOURNAL RANKING LISTS

In this section, we examine the pervasive influence of journal ranking lists on shared understandings, academic rules, languages, and procedures that comprise the work of researchers, journal editors, educators, managers, and academic administrators in our field of practice. While this discussion applies to the field of scholarship as a whole, we illustrate the issues in relation to the MLE and HRD fields. The core of our analysis is that journal ranking lists form an important influence on the habits, tacit knowledge, and ways of getting things done in the academic field of practice, since ranking list systems privilege “where and when” work is published (Pettigrew, 2011) over the cultural value of knowledge generation so that the currency of scholarship is redefined. Our Bourdieusian framing suggests that, as journal ranking lists have become ubiquitous, journal articles are better understood as generating symbolic rather than cultural capital. The four-part analysis we present addresses consequences of this shift for the practice of scholars.

First, we examine the power of journal ranking lists on the academic labor process and the legitimacy it accords to implicit scholarly *norms of practice* as they occur in the United States and Europe. Second, we consider the influence of journal ranking lists on the *work of academic administrators* in the higher education (HE) sector and the consequences for scholars’ performance expectations. Relating this analysis to the HRD and MLE fields, we illustrate this discussion with examples from the promotion criteria of 15 HE institutions located in North America and the United Kingdom. Third, we address the voluntary *academic work for journal production* that facilitates an apparatus which (implicitly) magnifies powerlessness and works to the disadvantage of scholarly practice situated in the Global South. Finally, we assess the effect of journal ranking lists on the shape and priorities of the HRD and MLE fields that influence the *organizational application* of research.

The argument that integrates these four areas of discussion is that the ubiquity of journal ranking lists

leads to simultaneous power and powerlessness for scholars at all levels of the hierarchy within the academic field of practice. For example, although AMLE is positioned highly in journal ranking lists, we argue that the shape and priorities of the field, as reflected in journal submissions and publications, reflect a skewing of the MLE field. This skewing is encouraged by the ubiquity of ranking list requirements and further renders specialist applied fields such as HRD almost invisible within the wider academic field of practice, as evidenced by the exclusion of HRD journals from Currie and Pandher’s (2013) list.

In our critique of the effect of journal ranking lists, we acknowledge, but do not accept, arguments that they represent a consensus in relation to journal quality. We further acknowledge advocates’ arguments that such lists provide a perceived objective way by which scholars can select appropriate channels to publish their work (Chartered Association of Business Schools, n.d.). We also note that their use is regarded as justification of a basis on which scholars can be judged and rewarded (Lowry, Humphreys, Malwitz, & Nix, 2007). However, although ranking lists have become a proxy for legitimacy within the academic field of practice, we reject the claim that ranking is an effective proxy for quality. We align our view with critiques that journal ranking lists rely on a reductionist and calculative paradigm that substitutes frequency of citation and placement in specific journals for quality of thought or scholarly contribution. We further agree with critics who have identified that the dominance of selective databases on which journal ranking lists are based may favor well-established North American journals but underrepresent the quality of journals in more specialist or emergent and innovative areas, including the HRD and MLE fields (Currie & Pandher, 2013).

### Norms of Practice

Journal ranking lists encourage a language of research productivity and instrumentality dominated by “where and when” work is published, rather than what has been published (Pettigrew, 2011). Increasingly, academic performance assessments value success rates in top-ranked journal publications over all other areas of socially useful or critical practice or knowledge generation. As a consequence, journal ranking lists dominate promotion and tenure decisions that may justify enduring status, hierarchical, employment, and career inequalities. For example, members of the tenured professoriate, and those who are labeled as “research active or research excellent,”

are expected to undertake progressively more and more research-related activities, sometimes to the exclusion of local service and teaching responsibilities. Those labeled as “not research excellent” are often subject to contingent and casual employment conditions and their focus and rewards are geared toward teaching increasing numbers of students and to the wider income generation and commercial functions of the institution (Ellis, McNicholl, Blake, & McNally, 2014; Leišytė, 2016; Marginson, 2008).

Those who aspire to employment in traditional academic (tenured) roles must submit to an instrumental form of scholarship measured by “outputs” published in high-ranking journals (Callahan, 2017). However, success in achieving publication in top-ranked journals requires new methods of practice. Evidence of increasing reliance on multi-authorship to achieve publication in top-ranked journals (Kuld & O’Hagan, 2018) has led to contestation over the author list order, with the first author as a coveted position associated with status or importance that may not accurately reflect the contribution to the paper of other members of the authoring group. Critics have also suggested that journal coauthorship might involve work that resembles a highly organized and networked production process that increasingly relies on principles of the division of labor (Ellis et al., 2014; Marginson, 2008). This is also associated with the pressure for new academics to specialize in narrowly defined areas. Critics have suggested that the publication imperative leads new scholars to focus their attention on finding an already well-published coauthor with whom to write, rather than on “seeding” and nurturing their own specific scholarly research topic (Kallio, Kallio, Tienari, & Hyvönen, 2016).

In short, journal ranking lists have an important influence on the norms of practice of the field. They affect the values, assumptions, and management of day-to-day social practice performed as academic work, as well as judgments about performativity in the HE field.<sup>1</sup> Our concern is that this legitimization of the demands associated with publishing work in top-ranked journals stifles empowerment, creativity, and collegiality.

The prioritization of this understanding of scholarly practice, in turn, may be associated with increasing

patterns of chronically stressed academics (Dean & Forray, 2018).

### Work of Academic Administrators

The second consequence of journal ranking lists relates to the work of heads of academic departments and senior university managers and administrators. Most of those whose practice involves university management, leadership, and administration commenced their career as academics, and self-identify as academic practitioners. For university managers, the ubiquity of ranking lists is manifested in the increasing requirement to legitimize differentiation between institutions to achieve competitive advantage in the global HE market. University administrators and managers find themselves in an ambiguous position. They may espouse a rhetoric of academic autonomy within the HE sector, but metrics about publication performativity form the taken-for-granted basis for strategy and management within the “new public management” paradigm (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Therefore, the use of journal ranking list metrics as a feature of new public management norms makes the academy “ever more complicit in its own subordination to performative processes that it frequently criticizes when observing them in the outside, ‘real’ world of management practice” (Tourish, 2011: 367). In this paradoxical situation, academic practitioners at very senior levels in the HE hierarchy experience both power and powerlessness as a result of the ubiquity of journal ranking lists. They find themselves subject to the “generative schemata” of ranking list positions that structures the practice (and reproduction) of internal and external institutional hierarchies and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1988). University managers are subjected to rankings at an institutional level but also make use of them as a basis for decision-making about resource distribution, determination of workload and effort, and judgments about reward, rank promotions, and recognition at local levels.

To illustrate this point, we noted the promotion criteria for 15 institutions (eight U.S., seven U.K.),<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Following Lyotard (1984, as cited in Bierema & Callahan, 2014), we use the term “performance” to denote specific actions and measures. We use the term “performativity” to refer to notions of a systemic or ideological shift away from human values toward efficiency, performance, and money.

<sup>2</sup> The institutions included eight from the United States (a mix of public and private doctoral R1 universities [two of which earned R1 status relatively recently], three of which are American Association of Universities institutions) and seven from the United Kingdom (five “post-92” institutions, one research-intensive university, and a Russell Group university). Despite the differing status of these institutions, there are some remarkable patterns amongst them that provide insight into our arguments about business schools’ use of ranking lists.

all of which we know to have established HRD or MLE scholars on staff. All but two of the U.K. institutions explicitly cite the U.K. Research Excellence Framework (REF) and some form of journal ranking (i.e., journal impact factor or Chartered Association of Business Schools [CABS] star rating) in their promotion criteria. The two institutions that do not do so nonetheless make use of language associated with the ranking hierarchies, using terms such as “publication in journals acknowledged as internationally excellent” or “world-leading.” The emphasis in U.S. institutions is more nuanced and complex. Only one of the eight U.S. institutions has any mention of ranking list (the Science Citation Index or Social Science Citation Index) as one of several indicators of publication quality. In the U.S. institutions, the promotion criteria are based upon a wider evidencing of scholarly reputation, demonstration of a scholarly identity, articulation of a coherent and continuous research agenda, or publication in “nationally regarded” outlets.

Some explanation of this difference in emphasis may be that U.K. institutions develop promotion policies at the central university level. In the United States, by contrast, promotion policies are developed at the faculty (or college) level. In the United States, it is typical for HRD scholars to be based in colleges of education and so the promotion policies applied by academic managers are developed in colleges of education.<sup>3</sup> However, for four of the U.S. institutions we were also able to review the promotion criteria for colleges of business, where MLE scholars are more likely to be based. In these institutions, we noted that the published promotion criteria indicate a preference for publications in specific journals on college of business websites. These celebrated journals are included as four-star journals in the CABS journal guide. Therefore, it can be inferred that, although policies may differ for schools of education, journal rankings lists are used to inform promotion processes in faculties of business in the United Kingdom and in the United States where MLE scholars are likely to be employed. This disconnect means that journals focusing on the subfield of HRD are less likely to be targeted by MLE scholars or appear on ranking lists that are privileged by the MLE subfield, despite the conjunctive nature of HRD and MLE work. As we have already indicated, our submission to this highly ranked journal renders us complicit in the process that we critique. However, we submit our

work here to raise questions about power relations, individual agency, and plurality of interests in our field of scholarship and to heighten awareness about the winners and losers from publishing practices.

### Academic Work of Journal Production

The third consequence of journal ranking lists for academic practice pertains to the work of journal editing, reviewing and publishing. These roles are important for the work of scholars in any field, and yet editing and reviewing are unrecognized and undervalued activities within higher education institutions (HEIs). A key feature of the “codes of civility” of journal publication is that the power relationship between journal editors, authors, and peer reviewers is simultaneously personal, political, and relational. Appointment to a journal editorial team presents status and reputational advantage for those in academic practice. However, the demand for publication outputs as a basis for tenure and promotion in academic practice has led to a sustained increase in the number of paper submissions. Huisman and Smits’ (2017) study of the duration and quality of the peer-review process across all discipline specialisms indicates lengthier review times and difficulties in accessing potentially qualified reviewers, particularly in social science disciplines. It is, therefore, unsurprising that editors find it increasingly challenging to obtain agreement from appropriate (unremunerated) reviewers to accept rather than decline expert peer review invitations. As a result, communication processes with authors in relation to their submitted work occur over increasingly long periods of time.

As outgoing editors of journals in the HRD field ourselves, we have reflected on the changed nature of editorial practice arising from the greater volume and frequency of journal submissions. Work processes related to manuscript submission are increasingly automated and editorial discretion is increasingly curtailed. Responsibility for much of the editing process, post acceptance, now resides with authors. Therefore, unless scholars are involved in editing a special issue, meaningful decisions about assembling journal volumes or issues, which serve as catalysts for substantive scholarly debates, no longer feature as part of editorial practice. Modarres (2015: 168) argued that, in this context, the practice of journal editorship risks being little more than being a “traffic controller,” having discretion only over where it is appropriate to accept a submission, and when that submission will be “landed” into a journal.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of one that was housed in a College of Technology.



For editors and authors alike, the imperative of achieving constant published outputs now requires a process of extended persistence through what might be described as a publishing “obstacle course” (Hubbard, 2015). This involves practices targeted at avoiding the danger of desk rejection, followed by responses designed to overcoming the hurdle of reviewer comments. Subsequent practices underpin the perseverance through a long process of revisions, and further processes of peer review and critique. Therefore, rising submission rates, limited ranges of journal outlets considered acceptable as a result of their differential symbolic capital, and peer review challenges also exacerbate the structural and systemically slow processes of publication. As a result, in many scholarly disciplines associated with management and business, the time frame for decision, revision, and eventual production of journal articles can be two to four years. However, this time frame is substantially slower than the organizational practice developments and management priorities about which the journal article might have been concerned (MacIntosh, Beech, Bartunek, Mason, Cooke, & Denyer, 2017).

Alongside the rapid increase in journal submission rates that pressure to publish in ranked journals has encouraged, further changes to publication practices have occurred, leading to an emerging Global North–Global South bifurcation. Dissemination through top-ranked journals occurs through an industry dominated by corporate publishing houses, which “allows subscription rates to be inflated” (Collyer, 2018: 62). This has implications for knowledge production in specialist fields (Nkomo, 2009), and costs for access to journals are often prohibitive for scholars in the Global South. The dominance of journals that reinforce “common sense” expectations of conformance to the scholarly preference for narrowly focused studies in well-established theoretical fields; a preference for abstract theorization; and the discouragement of methodological pluralism have been critiqued as dangers to scholarly diversity and as encouraging “quasi-colonial forms of identity work by those being Englishized” (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2019: 2).

Such mechanisms not only sustain global inequalities in terms of academic career trajectories (Collyer, 2018) but are also unresponsive to dynamic and fast-changing fields of practice in the management domain. Ironically, as publication volumes have increased both online and in print, changes have occurred to journal production processes. Increasingly, although journal submission and peer-

review processes are organized by editors working with publishers headquartered in the Global North, journal production processes are undertaken by production staff outsourced across the Global South (Modarres, 2015).

### Organizational Application

The fourth consequence of journal ranking processes relates to perceptions of the value accorded to abstract conceptualization and the impact this has on work directed toward organizational application. An important consequence of journal ranking lists is the increased preference of authors and editors toward abstract theorization and conceptual ideas, which is deemed to differentiate top-ranked journals. Consequently, the development of models and frameworks to inform advances in organizational practice are accorded less value (Tourish, 2011). Linked with this, the academic field of practice has become accustomed to a situation where the sacrifice of time is accepted as a necessary condition of the academic processes of peer review and publication processes that lead to the accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989). However, in applied fields such as MLE or HRD, the level of abstraction and the lengthy publication and production periods we highlight here lead to a situation where ideas generated through research upstream are perceived by downstream organizational practitioners as time-expired and lacking in relevance (MacIntosh et al., 2017).

A further consequence of the prevalence of journal ranking lists is that research impact is increasingly identified through citation impact factor metrics (Klein & Chiang, 2004). The publisher Sage (Sage U.K., n.d.), for example, advises several ways in which journal editors can increase citations of their journal. This advice privileges the interests of those already in dominant positions in the scholarly field as it includes invitations to highly cited authors to write for the journal. It further suggests editors identify zero-cited papers and discourage authors who submit papers on topics that may not quickly attract citations. Such practices also ignore the consequences of Open Access initiatives in U.K. HE, whereby prepublication versions of accepted journal articles are uploaded on university websites. This allows scholars without institutional access to journals to download articles, but reduces the number of downloads any one author will receive from a journal’s website. While this can make access to scholarship affordable for those without sufficient institutional budgets to access electronic journal

resources, it can have negative consequences for scholars seeking promotion or tenure whose case may partially depend on the number of their articles that have been downloaded.

In addition, the algorithms supporting journal ranking lists devalue scholarly outputs over time as they assume a short half-life of academic value. This is inappropriate for fields such as MLE and HRD, where good-quality research is characterized by evidence and theorization that are associated with long-term developmental practices in organizations and extended and careful processes of maximizing the value of applied initiatives through teaching, learning, and curriculum development in education settings. Second, such measures do not reflect the extent to which scholars adopt and use ideas as a feature of their teaching. In such instances, although impacts on subsequent practice by the student may arise, citations will occur in what students write for their tutors rather than what their tutors might write for publication (Schmidt-Wilk, 2019).

In this section, we argued that the ubiquitous influence of journal ranking lists has engendered important consequences for the habitus of the broader academic order and has had a negative effect on agentic academic practices in the field of scholarship as a whole. Journal ranking lists specifically affect assumptions about research impact, pedagogic impact, the decision criteria used to manage performance and careers, and the shape of the field as it develops.

#### THE EFFECT OF RANKING LISTS ON HRD AND MLE

In this section, we further illustrate our above arguments by focusing particularly on the influence on the field of HRD, conjunctive to the scholarship of MLE, as an example of their possible effect in niche fields within the broader discipline of social science and other applied fields of scholarship. As indicated above, the HRD field is concerned with inquiry into people, learning, and organizations—issues that align with the focus of the MLE field. As an applied field, HRD has much to offer MLE, including practical and research expertise relevant to personal, organizational, and societal factors that affect learning and education. HRD field values include a commitment to challenging contemporary social and organizational practices, critically examining organizational and individual assumptions, and identifying emancipatory practice as a feature of improved learning relationships, creativity, and productivity (Sambrook,

2008). Therefore, in this section we are influenced by the perspective of Özbilgin (2009), who highlighted the interaction between journal ranking systems, the (academic) labor process, and individual agency to understand how ranking systems reproduce systemic inequalities. In our assessment of the HRD and MLE fields, we acknowledge the probable inequities and disadvantages associated with gender, race, and class that Özbilgin identified. We contend that scholars whose practice focuses on areas that may be characterized as peripheral, specialist, or niche must direct their citations and scholarly practices toward scholars, editors, and topic areas that dominate scholarly practice (Collyer, 2018; Danell & Hjerm, 2013).

With regard to our concern that journal ranking lists exacerbate the “unequal bifurcation of world knowledge production” (Collyer, 2018: 58), we highlight here how areas of scholarship can become marginalized. Studies exploring publication practices in the Global South have argued that journal ranking lists privilege practices of scholarship in the Global North, which can be described as largely self-referent and inward-looking (e.g., Chavarro, Tang, & Ràfols, 2017; Collyer, 2018). Frequently, issues of importance to countries in the Global South are of little interest to top-ranked journals, which predominantly publish works for privileged audiences in the Global North (Chavarro, Ràfols, & Tang, 2018; Nkomo, 2009). Yet, HRD scholars from the Global South can potentially play a significant role in the HRD and MLE field’s conceptual and practical development through their research into the interaction between learning and education, and economic, social, national (e.g., Cho & McLean, 2017; Cunningham, Lynham, & Weatherly, 2006; Gedro & Hartman, 2016), and organizational (e.g., Achoui, 2009; Cho, Lim, & Park, 2015; Pareek & Rao, 2008) development.

We acknowledge that our argument is grounded in our positions as members of the HRD scholarly community and as past editors of HRD journals. We also recognize that, as scholars of the Global North, we are players in the field as well as subjects of the field. However, as academic institutions become increasingly corporatized (Parker & Jary, 1995), it becomes more important to consciously address the implications of practices that reproduce restricted scholarly debate and that reinforce hegemonic race, class, and gender norms (Chakravarty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain, 2018). It is also important to challenge the effect of journal ranking lists of forcing a choice for scholars between publishing for career progression or publishing to reach a relevant audience (Nkomo, 2009).

A further consequence and challenge for fields such as HRD and MLE is the homogenization of scholarship and privileging of certain languages, topics, and epistemologies that are deemed appropriate for top-ranking journals. This discourages engagement with innovations in organization practice; it also limits the potential to achieve impact on organizational practices and the quality of individuals' learning experiences. For example, the growth of management coaching and employee mentoring have important consequences for the MLE field. However, pressure on academic practitioners to research "more of the same" (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016) means that such research agendas, which emanate from the field of practice, are less visible in top-ranked journals. A keyword search for "coaching" or "mentoring" in the leading journals for HRD (*Human Resource Development Quarterly* [HRDQ]) and MLE (*Academy of Management Learning & Education* [AMLE]) from 2002 to 2018 highlighted this difference in visibility. During this period, coaching and mentoring appeared in HRDQ three times more frequently than in AMLE. Interestingly a keyword search relating to technology and learning, which is another emergent and important issue for both fields, lends further support to the claim of "more of the same" regarding research agendas, but indicates that this topic has found less traction in HRDQ than in AMLE, as we found a ratio of 2:3 in relation to our keyword search.

Another issue that arises from the ubiquity of journal ranking lists is the prominence of theoretical and conceptual development as a basis for sustained journal performance, as opposed to an emphasis on "social value" (Oswick & Hanlon, 2009). Critical thinking is increasingly regarded as appropriate for publishing in top-ranked journals, and we take a critical stance in relation to the fields of HRD and MLE. However, overemphasis on critical thinking that focuses principally on conceptual or abstract theory diminishes the perceived value of cocreation and developments in the field of practice. This may sideline practice-related research inquiry into topics such as diversity and social inclusion, incivility in the workplace, the digitization of learning systems and issues concerning machine learning and artificial intelligence. These issues are relevant to HRD research agendas and have important implications in the MLE field, but may not fit neatly into existing conceptual and critical-thinking frameworks.

The points we raise in this section all relate to our concern that scholars in the HRD and MLE fields may lose an important feature of their authentic voice as a

result of journal ranking lists that foster a (de)valuing of academic practice. As numeric indicators associated with journal ranking lists increasingly drive measures of scholarly performance, so too may research topics in the HRD and MLE fields may be evaluated through criteria directed at publication proficiency at the expense of academic, organizational, or wider social value. There is a danger that HRD and MLE scholars' interests and curiosity will become subsumed by the requirements for success in a system that aligns scholarly quality with publication destination (Alakavuklar, Dickson, & Stablein, 2017; Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Such alienation of scholars from the products of their (would-be) passions serves to limit the generation of new knowledge and constrain the boundaries of what is known and understood in the field beyond what is considered to be immediately "citable" (Sangster, 2015). As we have experienced in the HRD field, journal ranking processes narrow the scope of publication outlets. Increasingly, authors select only journals at the top of ranking lists as the basis for their literature search processes. This may further reinforce the invisibility of specialized and potentially cutting-edge scholarship, published in niche field journals that, by their very nature, will have lower citation rates.

Also directly relevant to the HRD and MLE fields is the depreciation of educational activity in our field of practice. A premise of HRD and MLE is that important opportunities for impact on practice occur through teaching, learning, and curriculum development in education settings. However, the dominance of journal ranking lists means that such activities are accorded less priority. Thus, as publishing in highly ranked journals is valorized, other impactful practice involving education and teaching is less recognized. A negative consequence of the ubiquity of ranking lists for the HRD and MLE field, as well as for business and management more widely, is that the identification of learning innovations, research agendas, or methodologies is placed lower in the HE "orders of preference" (Bourdieu, 1988: 109) than is publication work that meets the requirements of top-ranked journals. Indeed, such activity may be rendered almost invisible to those in positions of power and authority within HEIs (Cotton, Miller, & Kneale, 2018). A consequence of the lack of recognition of the importance of teaching and education is that novel learning innovations, research agendas, or methodologies with potential value to the MLE field are not developed. A further important consequence of the journal ranking processes pertains to issues and assumptions about

value and impact. From our perspective as scholars whose practice is located in the field of HRD, we are concerned that research published in top-ranked journals may privilege inquiry into high-status management and leadership work but inhibit the space from which critical voices can question and examine the learning and educational experiences of those in lower-status roles within organizations.

These observations about the effects of journal ranking lists support our contention that priorities for academic practice reflect the currency of scholarly value dominated by codes of civility that elevate the perceived value of journal rankings and citation metrics. This means that learning, teaching, curriculum innovation, and impactful professional education and development practices are accorded less worth and are under-rewarded compared with work leading to publication in top-ranked journals. We suggest that innovations in learning and education, as well as novel curriculum agendas or methodologies, are overlooked.

We also argue that journal ranking lists that are derived from citation metrics make more visible a small “*élite*” cadre of scholars in the HRD and MLE fields who publish a large proportion of research and scholarship in the highest-ranked journals. Scholars in the MLE field whose work is extensively downloaded as a basis for practical application, but whose work is not necessarily cited, find their work devalued. In common with other parts of the academic labor market, a further invisible majority of scholars must operate in increasingly precarious work circumstances. Their work progressively involves unrecognized activities linked with learning, teaching, student support, income generation, and program administration. This self-reinforcing system of practice in HE serves to solidify the barriers between different types of occupational work and makes the transition from one group to another increasingly unlikely.

## IMPLICATIONS

In writing this essay we are aware that the scholarly field of practice has moved beyond arguments for or against the existence of ranking lists, so our intention is not to argue that they should be discontinued. Instead, we draw on our Bourdieusian framing of symbolic power relations engendered and sustained through journal ranking lists to identify lines of tension that underpin what we identify as conditions for change in our fields of scholarship. We contend that academic agency might exploit these conditions

for change to impact positively on both HRD and MLE theorization and practice. In this section we pull together and develop our argument to add to debate about the future shape of the MLE and HRD fields.

An important conceptual contribution of our analysis is the identification of a shift in the distribution of different types of capital across the academy. This represents the first condition for change that we identify. We argue that journal ranking list systems privilege assumptions about research quality as a function of where and when work is published (Pettigrew, 2011) over the cultural value of knowledge generation, thus diminishing its materiality and disrupting its relationship with the fundamental embodied form of cultural capital. Our Bourdieusian framing leads us to suggest that in this context journal articles are now better understood as generating symbolic rather than cultural capital. While, in contrast to economic, social, and cultural capital, Bourdieu conceptualized symbolic capital as subjective, none-the-less symbolic capital legitimates power relations (Bourdieu, 1990).

We argue that this shift in the currency of journal articles constitutes a condition for change, as the redistribution of types of capital engenders a tension between simultaneous power and powerlessness among those in positions of academic or management seniority. Our analysis indicates that tension between power and powerlessness arises because objective positions of institutional power in the field are subject to the outcome of increasingly precarious outcomes from journal article submission. These rules are played out at both individual and institutional levels, but the accumulation of symbolic capital relies, paradoxically, on what Bourdieu (1990: 89) referred to as the objective existence of “probable futures.”

This shift calls for a complicity that entrusts institutional probable futures as well as individual careers to the outcome of anticipated or achieved publication in top-ranked journals. The logic of journal submission and publication processes in a field of practice characterized by competition and struggles for legitimacy is to substantially increase both the time periods involved in journal publication processes and the risks associated with submission. Powerlessness in relation to their probable future career increases for individual scholars who submit their work to high-ranked journals and must experience processes of postponement, deferral, suspension, or rejection. Powerlessness in relation to their probable future of employment also increases for

those who choose not to play the game by not submitting their work to highly ranked publications, as institutional positioning within ranking hierarchies, determined by the outcomes of success in journal publications, will determine the local labor market demand, affecting their employment.

Paradoxically, HE managers also become increasingly complicit in their own subordination. While they wield formal power of performance management and career futures, for example, through implementing tenure procedures or determining entry into institutional research assessment and comparison exercises, senior scholars and managers cannot influence what will be published or when publication might occur. Academic managers are well aware that academic power is accumulated and maintained at the cost of constant and heavy expenditure of time. They wield power over workload allocation to provide space for publication-focused labor. However, journal ranking list processes represent a classification system that exerts a tacit, invisible, pervasive violence in everyday management practices associated with institutional struggles for legitimacy. The timescale or outcomes of the journal paper submission process are neither controllable nor predetermined. In this regard, HE managers and administrators are powerless as their institutional rankings and probable futures remain subject to increasingly uncertain ranking list positions. Simultaneous power and powerlessness thus arises as the “rules of the game” legitimize a classification system that structures academic careers and institutional hierarchies, creating a field that “resembles a strange obstacle race where everyone classifies, and is classified . . . the best classified becoming the best classifiers of those who enter the race” (Bourdieu, 1988: 217).

Our second contribution is that we problematize conceptualizations of academic practice by describing the differential symbolic power positioning in relation to research, teaching, learner support, academic leadership, and research administration. The “ideal representation” of the virtues of the academy in a globalized HE context where levels of student enrollment continue to increase is one that values common culture, norms, and values, driven by overlapping duties and responsibilities shared within the academic field of practice. Our conceptualization of struggles resulting from unequal distribution of symbolic capital in conjunctive fields is of practice and experience characterized by contestation over legitimacy and status. We propose that journal ranking lists exert a divisive effect on

symbolic capital resources associated with learning, teaching, and education. In this struggle, symbolic capital associated with research publication in high-ranking journals degrades the symbolic resources associated with other areas of our practice.

In developing this argument we acknowledge that the model of academic practice we focus our attention toward is not necessarily universal. A large proportion of members of the academic field of practice are employed in temporary jobs, and the extent to which academic roles require exclusive specialization in research, teaching, learner support, academic leadership, and research administration has proven difficult to estimate (Paye, 2012). However, assessments of career profiles (e.g., Collinson, 2006; Paye, 2012) have suggested that abandonment of research activity at any point in an academic’s career represents a point of no return. The differential valorization of journal publication serves to diminish the cultural and symbolic capital value of academic practice in areas outside of research for publication in highly ranked journals. This represents a second line of tension and, we argue, might be a condition of change.

Evidence from the United Kingdom has suggested some initial responses that have attempted to address this condition of change. Increasing interest in the impact of research outside academia in the REF assessment process (Research England, 2019a) may be interpreted as attempting to restore some sense of balance. Advocates have also suggested that assessments focusing on institutional-level teaching and learning Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) outcomes, such as employability (Office for Students, 2018) and the efficiency and effectiveness of universities in achieving knowledge exchange with non-academic stakeholders (Research England, 2019b) represent policy responses to the lines of tension we have identified, at the institutional level. These policy developments warrant our identification of unequal symbolic capital distribution associated with different roles and specialisms within the academic field. However, our Bourdieusian framing of the academy as a field of practice suggests the enduring effect of symbolic violence that scholars bear within themselves (Bourdieu, 1977); that is, the ways in which scholars reproduce their own subordination. This means that policy changes such as these represent an additional workplace stressor and add to task intensity for academics. Without such policy developments, though, the bifurcation of capital between research and other features of academic practice that is taken

for granted will persist. Conceptually, this represents a disconnect between levels of aspiration and levels of achievement in the academic field. It signifies a contrast between the ideal representation of the academy and objective career and practice realities.

Our third contribution is that we reinvigorate debate about the shape of the fields of HRD and MLE in the context of the increasingly crowded terrain of the Academy. The ubiquity of ranking lists skews the shape and priorities of the MLE and HRD fields. However, as scholars we operate in a context that can ameliorate some of these negative consequences through scholarship grounded in, and extending the range of, practical, ideological, or methodological contributions to the field. In common with other interdisciplinary forms of scholarship, the context of the MLE and HRD fields is their positioning in different schools or faculties that espouse different value systems and grounding paradigms. Joint scholarly and professional activity and the principles of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007) are fundamental to the espoused culture and discourse of both fields with a commitment to research quality espoused as being robust, ethical, and relevant to application in practice-orientated situations. Building on Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus, we argue that systemic culture and discourse results from both academic agency and the objective conditions of HE. Scholarly experience is an important feature of the formation and circulation of discourse. Although journal ranking systems are implicit features of everyday academic life, scholarly self-hood is a function of social conditions, rather than being determined by them.

Scholars in the HRD and MLE fields are both actors and subjects in the shape and priorities of their fields. We have argued that journal ranking lists have enabled the MLE field to hold more instantiated power relative to HRD but such power is related in meaningful, and sometimes overlapping ways, across this and conjunctive subfields. Although journal ranking skews the shape of the MLE field and renders important features of the HRD field almost invisible, conceptually the values of both fields extend beyond these empirical and epistemic limitations. Consistent with the principles of Bourdieu's challenge that scholars should critique and question taken-for-granted forms of knowledge and practice, we contend that HRD and MLE scholars operate in a context with the potential to ameliorate some of the undesirable consequences of journal ranking processes. We propose revaluing principles of scholarship grounded in practice-led knowledge, and

actionable knowledge application as the basis of research quality evaluation. We further propose an explicit legitimization of scholarship promoting a wider range of ideological, methodological, or practical settings.

Building on Anderson, Ellwood, and Coleman's (2017) argument, we conceptualize scholarship in the fields of MLE and HRD as directed at impact-focused knowledge and learning beyond the limitations and assumptions about research quality that underpin journal ranking processes. We conceptualize practice and research in MLE and HRD that encourages a plurality of theoretical paradigms as the basis for a diverse yet rigorous understanding of ethical and scholarly value.

### CALL TO ACTION

To conclude this essay, we make a call to action for strategic scholarly engagement to exploit transformative possibilities. Our contention is that journal ranking lists contribute to the marginalization of individual scholars and fields of scholarship in applied fields. Our call to action addresses the danger to creative and innovative curricula and pedagogic developments, research agendas, and methodologies in the HRD and MLE fields. Journal ranking lists do not simply provide a checklist for a place to publish and articles to cite. As a mechanism for symbolic capital in the academy they reinforce hegemonic structures of knowledge and inequality.

Debates about ranking lists defy resolution. However, although the challenges faced in fields of academic practice may appear to be intractable, grounded in Bourdieu's conceptualization of fields of practice, we propose action to prevent journal ranking list processes in their current form becoming too "settled" a feature of field stability (Krause, 2018). The core of our call to action is Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Every field of practice would be condemned to disappearance were there not a corresponding habitus of (academic) agents. Fields of scholarship are only a social reality through their continual reanimation through, and within, the interactions of scholars. Bourdieu's framing identifies the potential for agency when breaches arise between expectations and contextualized experiences (Decoteau, 2016). For applied fields such as HRD and MLE, the effect of journal ranking lists constitutes a "material rift"; a disjuncture between the legitimizing reliance on journal ranking lists with the habitus of HRD and MLE fields. In situating habitus within analysis of (academic) field effects, our essay

identifies the potential for social change. We call for academic agency to contest, reconcile, and reconstruct (Whitchurch, 2010) the fields of MLE and HRD.

Our first call to action might be considered limited in scope. However, given the trend toward the increasing size of coauthorship groups associated with the dominance of journal ranking processes and the imperative for scholars to publish, we argue that, at the level of individual scholarship, HRD and MLE scholars can overturn ordering protocols that have become proxies for hierarchization within article authorship. In place of a list of authors where different symbolic value is attached to an author's place on the list, we propose that the HRD and MLE fields embed an expectation of a reflective explanation of the extent to which authorship process of any publication featured collaborative and collective knowledge generation. Even a small change such as this would represent a significant disrupter of the "codes of civility" that represent an important feature of habitus.

Our next call to action aims higher. We invite senior MLE and HRD scholars to shift the shape of their fields through radical revision to codes of civility, role-modeling, and revitalized forms of academic socialization in order to revive and reactivate them. Our call is to senior scholars, especially those with an influence on university management and reward processes, business school accreditation bodies, and those who are influential in professional associations involved in learning and education. We call on these scholars, who consider themselves empowered within the field, to engage in contestation of current norms. We propose that reconciliation of scholarship with practice be advanced through knowledge cocreation and imaginative approaches to evidence-based practice. Therefore, we call on senior scholars to reconstruct commitment to cocreated and evidence-based work through its valorization in journal publication.

We recognize that this is a demanding call to action that would require sustained commitment by both scholars and influential practitioners. One such initiative in the United Kingdom has involved the development of collaborative relationships between senior HRD and MLE scholars in United Kingdom and the U.K. professional body the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). This collaboration has led to the establishment of a high-profile conference platform for senior practitioners and academics featuring high-quality applied research projects linked with publication

opportunities in journals representing all levels of the current ranking lists (CIPD, n.d.). Commitment to reconstruction of the field in this way would further require the creation of role specifications, rewards, and incentives to facilitate mobility and role enhancement between the academy and practice settings. In addition, it would require promotion and tenure criteria to recognize partnership building, consultancy, and teaching and pedagogic development activity as equivalent to academic and theoretical research specialisms. HRD scholars who are located across different schools and faculties, such as schools of education and technology colleges, are well-placed to work collaboratively with those in other faculty locations to contest, reconcile, and reconstruct promotion, tenure, performance, and rewards systems so as to be less reliant on the normative assumptions of journal ranking list outputs. We recognize that senior scholars experience as many forms of work intensification as others in the field of practice, wherever they are located, and our proposals would add to this. However, we contend that agency at this time has the potential to generate opportunities for meaningful and professionally fulfilling work at all levels in the academic field of practice.

Third, we direct a call to action to journal editors and peer reviewers, who are key agents in the objectified, and increasingly lengthy, knowledge-production process that results in journal publication. In collaboration with influential agents in scholarly associations, and challenged by reviewer suggestions in the development of our essay, we call for contestation of current journal review procedures and criteria as the basis for decisions about journal quality and impact. Scholarly associations in our fields already espouse the basis for reconciliation. For example, the vision of the Academy of Management is to "inspire and enable a better world through our scholarship and teaching about management and organizations" (Academy of Management, n.d.). The aim of the journal *Management Learning* is to "provide a unique forum for critical inquiry, innovative ideas and dialogue" (Management Learning, n.d.). The HRD journal *Human Resource Development International* espouses a commitment to "questioning the divide between practice and theory; between the practitioner and the academic; and between traditional and experimental methodological approaches" (Human Resource Development International n.d.).

Peer review is acknowledged as the basis of quality assurance in journal articles, and as HRD scholars

who have also served as editors-in-chief of three different HRD journals we recognize the challenges of securing timely, rigorous, and constructive reviews for an increasing number of submissions. Our call to action is for reconciliation between theory, research, and practice through the inclusion of at least one practice-based reviewer for each manuscript. This would enable a robust assessment of the direct link to practice or pedagogic intervention, or the extent of knowledge cocreation processes involving practitioners as well as scholars. Reconstruction of the journal review process through facilitating openly accessible review processes would further provide opportunities for wider and more inclusive discussion. For example, the journal *BMC Medical Education* operates an open peer-review system, where the reviewers' names are included on the peer review reports for authors. If the article is published, the named reviewer reports are published online alongside the article. Invitations to undertake peer review remain an editorial responsibility but, through this more transparent process, peer reviewers and editors are accountable for decisions made. In addition to greater transparency, the process provides valuable learning opportunities for experienced, as well as emerging, reviewers, and such a system would provide a further mechanism for reviewers' work to be appreciated. This approach, which has also been suggested in relation to management journals more widely (Dobusch & Heimstädt, 2019), requires bold editors who are willing to interpret reviews where there is no clear agreement. However, the HRD and MLE fields already lead the way in editorial skills of synthesizing feedback in a constructive and developmental way as they reach decisions about the manuscripts they receive.

Our fourth call to action addresses the bifurcation of the practice of scholarship between the Global North and South that we, and other scholars, have described. A direct link between the ubiquity of journal ranking lists, normative scholarly expectations and the lack of published research from parts of the Global South is difficult to establish. Nonetheless, ongoing concerns across the university sector about equality and diversity make it timely to contest the disadvantage of scholarly expertise situated in the Global South. We urge the MLE and HRD editorial boards to represent a wider range of geographical locations. We further call for reconstruction of editorial boards to reconcile the voices of other practice-based stakeholder groups in encouraging and supporting the publication of work that responds to

the learning, education, and training challenges and complexities of global events. In taking this action, boards will be better placed to take innovative steps toward reconstructing scholarly communication through their journals to challenge the privilege of geographic regions or the dominance of native English speakers. For example, the journal *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* has called for papers to a special issue in Spanish (Elsevier, n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Manuscripts are to be submitted and reviewed in Spanish; articles selected for publication will only then be translated into English and published, with native language versions available online. This extends the reach of the publication, and gives greater voice to Global South scholars by making publishing in English fiscally accessible.

We make a further call for field-wide challenge of the hierarchization and cultural consequences of journal ranking lists, the limitations of which have been articulated in this journal and elsewhere (e.g., Adler & Harzing, 2009; Bachrach et al., 2017; Ryazanova, McNamara, & Aguinis, 2017). Journal ranking systems as they are currently constituted are being challenged (Declaration on Research Assessment [DORA], n.d.; Hicks, Wouters, Waltman, de Rijcke, & Ràfols, 2015; Research England, 2015), and radical questioning is necessary regarding the assumptions about research quality that they engender and to encourage innovation and socially beneficial forms of knowledge generation and production. The formation in the United Kingdom of a forum to promote responsible research metrics, following the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, n.d.) initiated within the science community, suggests to us that agency by senior scholars and managers is timely to add momentum to conditions of change that are already evident in the broader field of scholarly practice.

The conditions of change we have identified are grounded in our Bourdieusian framing. We argue that contesting ranking processes and their negative effect on innovative, integrative, and international scholarship is timely for our field. Our call is for a reconsideration of the metrics to better reflect attributes of high-quality research. We advocate for agency to promote international agreement about the appropriate use of metrics and performance management processes to take account of a wider range of indicators of quality. First, citations over longer time

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<sup>4</sup> We are indebted to Dr. Mary A. Vera-Colina, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, for bringing this special issue to our attention.



frames are pertinent to research quality evaluations in applied contexts. Second, research quality indicators that take into account citations in a broader range of literature forms are necessary. We argue that evidence of practical application, and other measures of sustained impact and reach to relevant audiences, such as by geographical region or by practitioner-based communities, are necessary in relation to both download and citation metrics. In addition, evaluation of research quality requires qualitatively grounded assessments of the value of scholarship through its application in practice and benefit to social and individual well-being (Dean & Forry, 2016).

We recognize that regulatory issues affecting university governance and, in some countries, funding opportunities and requirements, now rely on performance judged through metrics associated with journal ranking lists. However, our call is for contestation, reconciliation, and reconstruction of academic practice to transform expectations about the influence journal ranking processes have on the boundaries, grounding paradigms, identity, and relationship with professional practice of both MLE and HRD fields. In making this call to action through the medium of the leading journal in the MLE field, we emphasize the potential and distinctive power of scholars who might consider themselves currently empowered to look beyond the normative assumptions of journal ranking list expectations.

In the context of our own field of HRD in relation to MLE, we regret the erosion of the value of scholarship focused on teaching and learning practice, and regard relationships with practitioners as the worse for it. Even those academic practitioners who have benefitted from the opportunities that journal ranking lists present may also have experienced a sense of lost opportunities to engage in knowledge generation processes characterized by imagination, creativity, and vision. Therefore, we call on scholars with compelling cultural and symbolic capital resources to leverage their power and academic agency to shift the shape of the MLE and HRD fields to promote and reward greater levels of pluralism, curiosity, and intellectual flexibility with impact on both theory and practice. We make a call for change, and hope that those with power to make a difference in the field of practice and scholarship will read and respond to our provocation. We hope that academic practitioners, whether they be established academic leaders, members of the professorial elite, or at some earlier stage in their careers, will grasp the opportunity

to develop the basis for scholarship in our fields, to enhance learning and education scholarship, and to advance organizational and societal understanding and well-being.

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**Valerie Anderson** is Professor of Human Resource Development and Education at the University of Portsmouth, U.K. Her research interests are in employability, HRM standards and standardization, and learning in work organization and higher education settings.

**Carole Elliott** is Professor of Organization Studies at Sheffield University Management School, U.K. Before her appointment at Sheffield, she was Professor of Human Resource Management at Roehampton University. Her research interests include Critical HRD; leadership learning, and gender and leadership.

**Jamie Callahan** is Professor of Leadership & HRD, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, U.K. Her research applies concepts of adult learning and organization studies to address issues of power and privilege in relation to marginalized groups’ (especially women’s) experiences of leadership, emotion management, and organizational context.



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