TWENTY YEARS AFTER MENTZER:
A POLEMIC ON LOGISTICS RESEARCH RIGOUR AND RELEVANCE TODAY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper is a polemic that explores the overarching issue of rigour and relevance in logistics and SCM (LSCM) research today. The starting point for this paper is Tom Mentzer's publications beginning twenty years ago about the need for rigour and relevance in LSCM research. The purpose of this paper is to stimulate thinking and debate among colleagues in the LSCM academic community about these issues and remind them of the need to keep them at the forefront of their own research.

Design/methodology/approach

The authors used an autoethnographic approach to examine this issue, based on their collective sixty years' experience in academia. After a review of appropriate literature on the topic, data was collected from discussions among the paper's authors as well as recounting open discussions with other academics and editors of LSCM journals to collate their observations.

Findings

The changes in the academic environment towards a 'publish or perish' culture have altered the landscape of LSCM research as it appears in journals. It has led to 'salami-slicing' of research to the extent that novelty in papers has been reduced to a minimum. Further, parts of research are reported in a way that fits journal expectations rather than noting the research approach and methods as they were actually applied in the research. Ultimately, this may undermine ground-breaking findings in LSCM and lead to a stagnation of the discipline.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)

This paper is based on personal observations and experiences of the three authors as well as open-ended discussions with others in the LSCM community.

Practical implications (if applicable)

Practical implications are provided for LSCM academics in their roles as authors and journal editors.

Social implications (if applicable)

Encouraging the LSCM academic community to improve the rigour, relevance and quality of research will result in better impact and outcomes for society at large.

Original/value

The value of this paper is in stimulating thinking and debate amongst LSCM academics to come back to core issues in the discipline and seek both rigour and relevance.

Keywords: Logistics, Supply chain management, Research, Rigour, Relevance, Academia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over twenty years ago the late Tom Mentzer, in conjunction with different co-authors, began publishing a series of papers about the need for research rigour, relevance and the proper use of appropriate theories and frameworks in several logistics and supply chain management (LSCM) and marketing journals (for example Mentzer and Kahn, 1995; Mentzer and Flint, 1997; Mentzer et al., 2001; Mentzer et al., 2004; Mentzer, 2008). That work stimulated other authors to also discuss issues in logistics and supply chain theory, methodology and methods up (for example New and Payne, 1995; Näslund, 2002; Grant, 2004; Spens and Kovács, 2006; Halldórsson et al., 2007; Flynn, 2008; Halldórsson et al., 2015). However, there has been less published about these issues for almost a decade while at the same time the global academic landscape has shifted more towards a 'publish or perish' environment, which used to be considered the preserve of the US. We have seen several distressing behavioural effects in this new landscape.

Firstly, the concept of being a professional academic and providing service to the wider academic community, inter alia reviewing and examining PhDs, has waned as academics keep their heads down to write for publication and research grant funding applications. Also, such behaviour favours 'gaming' and 'salami-slicing' as publishing strategies, with a dearth of ground-breaking research or with meaningful results being cut up into minuscule contributions to warrant numerous publications, reporting fractions of a study instead of the various elements of its research process, leading to a lack of chain of evidence in publications. Finally, an increase of submissions to academic journals has forced editors to seek reviewers far and wide to undertake reviewing tasks, and send out manuscripts that might be better rejected at the desk but which slip through due to the volumes that are being processed.

As a result, we are concerned as logistics and SCM (LSCM) researchers, reviewers and journal editors that there is less rigour and relevance in some of today's publications in our discipline, notwithstanding claims to the contrary by journal editors and publishers. We consider this topic very relevant given antecedent pressures that LSCM and other academics face today, and thus present this paper to stimulate thinking and debate among LSCM academic community colleagues about these issues as a reminder of the need to keep them at the forefront of their own research so that our collective integrity and credibility is not impaired in future. We did not actively look at any other disciplines other than some corollary disciplines to LSCM. Our objective was to focus on LSCM and not be accused of incorrectly commenting on practices in disciplines where we do not work − we can only comment on things we know and understand.

This paper is structured as follows. After discussing the methods used we look at the purpose of academia and academics, focussing on research as a major part of academic activities and the academic landscape in the 21st century as an antecedent or inhibitor of some types of behaviour. Then, we discuss the nature of research and publishing in the context of rigour and relevance from the perspectives of journal authors and editors. We next discuss the issues affecting this nature and conclude the paper with suggestions to improve the state of academic research generally and LSCM research specifically.

2. METHODS

This paper is a *polemic* that explores the overarching issue of rigour and relevance in LSCM research and is meant to stimulate debate among colleagues in the LSCM academic community about these issues and remind them of the need to keep them at the forefront of their own research. As such it is not a traditional paper that develops or empirically tests theory. However, that does not imply that this paper has not adopted a rigorous approach.

We used an analytical autoethnography approach for this paper. Ethnography is a well-known and rigorous approach qualitatively analysing institutional contexts and is well suited to providing researchers with rich insights into human, social and organizational aspects in such contexts (Harvey and Myers, 1995). Autoethnography is an autobiographical form of ethnography where the ethnographer is *"(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena"* (Anderson, 2006, p.373). This posits that autoethnographic research is socially constructed, includes explicit and reflexive self-observation, and uses qualitative methods (Näslund, 2002; Grant, 2000).

After a review of appropriate literature on the topic, data was collected from discussions among the paper's authors as well as recounting open discussions with other academics and editors of LSCM journals to collate their observations. The authors of this paper have a collective 60 years' experience as logistics academics that includes journal paper authorship and reviewing, journal editing, research grant application submission and reviewing, and conference organisation. In that regard, this polemic is based on our personal observations and experiences, combined with being very involved in the LSCM academic community and discussing these issues over time with logistics academics but also national and international ranking institutions. We only report general details of examples and instances of behaviour that we have encountered over the years, and do not provide names of academics, editors or journals unless such encounters are in the public domain. We do believe that 'naming and shaming' would be counter-productive to our intentions.

3. THE ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The purpose of universities has been discussed since their inception in medieval Europe. Newman's work originally published in 1852, and recently reprinted (Newman, 2008), represents a classical view whereby his discussion of a 'liberal education' set-out a range of ideas about people, knowledge and intellectual communities. In Newman's view, universities were dependent upon the Church for their integrity. His notion of the Church's involvement reflects the historical evolution of universities, which were first founded and run by the Church in the days before the modern printing press allowed wider dissemination of knowledge.

Notwithstanding, winds of change were already blowing in the nineteenth century and universities were increasingly under threat as they came to resemble, in Newman's words, *"a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill"* (Newman, 2008, p. 145). A more contemporary view came from Veblen (1918), who considered that the university's place in modern life related to industrial arts and technology, and that the scheme of knowledge should also consider the pursuit of business. A counter argument to this view comes from Collini, who noted *"that subjects which were initially introduced for broadly practical purposes have outlived those purposes and gone on to establish themselves as scholarly disciplines in their own right"* (2012, p. 53).

However, the genie was out of the bottle well over a century ago and today the university encompasses more than simply the liberal arts; indeed our own 'discipline' of LSCM (in single quotations reflecting some views that this topic is not a real academic discipline) is very much applied and business-orientated. This view, where *"some great men"* insisted *"that Education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured"* has led us to the situation in the 21st century where we are now *"making Education and Instruction useful, and Utility has becomes their watchword"* (Newman, 2008, p. 154).

Cue decreasing funding for universities from governments and rising managerialism in university administration coupled with various performance measurement schemes and key performance indicators (KPIs) that have come into use at universities from the business sector during the last decade (Graeber, 2015; Jump, 2015). What then for rigour and relevance, and coupled with that, what is the role of a 'professional academic' in today's universities and how does that role enhance or inhibit rigour and relevance? We next turn to the latter issue.

In our view, being a professional academic has two purposes: *creating knowledge* through research, particularly with organisations in the LSCM discipline or from externally-funded research projects; and *sharing that knowledge* through teaching and dissemination through publication in academic and other types of journals, books, etc., as well as engagement with the public square, policy makers and organisations that might make use of the research and knowledge. However, the new environmental pressures noted above, which academics operate under in many countries, has in our view led to a narrowing of focus amongst some academics with an attendant and subsequent decrease in the rigour and relevance we all seek.

A professional academic, in addition to his/her teaching and research obligations, should perform some elements of 'service' to his/her university (aka administration) and to the wider academic community. The latter includes *inter alia* reviewing for journals, conferences or funding bodies, providing seminars for other academics and none-academic organisations, and external examining teaching programmes or post-graduate degrees, e.g. PhDs. And yet, as there is little recognition given in university appraisal for such activities, i.e. academics' KPIs do not include such activities, we have seen a decrease in the willingness of academics to undertake this 'service', which has a knock-on effect in several areas. The one we are most concerned with here is reviewing for journals.

Since academics are required to publish in top-quality journals, the ability of those journals to provide high-quality and timely reviews is dependent on other academics being willing to provide them. However, at a workshop in summer 2015 hosted by Aalto University and Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, editors of three of the top LSCM journals: *Journal of Business Logistics*, *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, and *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, remarked that it was difficult to get reviewers to do so. One editor noted that it sometimes takes fifteen attempts to find the three reviewers the journal aspires to

for each submitted paper. That ratio expends a lot of time on behalf of the journal and the editors and also affects time of the academics solicited.

At the same time, authors, reviewers, and editors all belong to the same group of academics who just take different roles at different times (Gilmore et al., 2006). One could even call this a rather closed-loop supply chain. Authors not contributing to the review process as reviewers of other articles do not in fact do neither themselves or the discipline a favour, as this only extends the times for getting (good) reviews back.

4.   RIGOUR AND RELEVANCE IN LSCM

It has long been held that dissemination through academic journals should be both rigorous, i.e. theory or evidence-based and properly executed, and relevant to those who might read and use the research. This belief is in many non-LSCM disciplines such as marketing and retailing and general management (for example Van de Ven, 1989; Whetten, 1989; Piercy, 2002; Lundberg, 2004; Corley and Gioia, 2011), as well as LSCM (for example Mentzer and Kahn, 1995; New and Payne, 1995; Mentzer and Flint, 1997; Grant, 2004; Spens and Kovács, 2006; Flynn, 2008; Mentzer, 2008; Fawcett and Waller, 2011; Harland, 2013. Mentzer's work provided theoretical and practical guidelines for academics to ensure their work was properly rigorous and relevant.

Huynh (2013) argued that three theories are primarily used in LSCM research: the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (15.4%), transaction cost economics (TCE) or transaction cost theory (8.9%) and game theory (7.7%). These three, together with eleven other theories that all are less than 5% each, comprise 60% of all theories used (Huynh, 2013). Halldórsson et al. (2007) argued that besides RBV and TCE the other two theories that could assist LSCM research are network theory (NT) and principal-agent theory (PAT). Looking at a specific sub-set of LSCM, humanitarian LSCM, we find that inventory control theory and systems theory comprise 6.8% of all theories used, no other theory exceeds 2% (Tabaklar et al., 2015).

This lack of theoretical diversity, depth, and application in LSCM research might be due to what Halldórsson et al. call 'conceptual slack', which they consider is a divergence in *"analytical perspectives and methodological approaches and boundaries"* related to other disciplines such as *"operations management, purchasing, quality management and industrial networks"* (2015, p. 574). Research in LSCM as an independent discipline in business and operations has only been undertaken since the 1960s. Thus, *"compared to older and more established disciplines… logistics does not have as rich a heritage of theory development and empirical research"* (Stock, 1997, p.515).

Mentzer et al. considered that *"logistics researchers have made little effort to build a unified theory of logistics"* (2004, p. 606) and presented a *"comprehensive view of logistics capabilities within a unified theory of logistics"* that they considered *"important to the logistics discipline as the scope of the discipline expands from operational issues into such strategic issues as customer service, customer value, and relationship management"* (2004, p. 622). One editor at the Helsinki workshop referred to above noted to one of the authors that a review of the last twenty years of their respective journal revealed that theoretical consideration did not comprise a part of many papers during the first ten years. The editors reinforced the notion that theory is an important cornerstone of any research to provide rigour and will continue to be so in future.

But what comprises research rigour? Mentzer and Kahn (1995) argued that logistics research lacked a rigorous orientation but posited that as logistics research was founded in the positivist paradigm, and proposed a framework for research that follows the scientific method

and a quantitative paradigm to assist researchers in developing rigorous research. Their framework was not unique as it used a basic format of idea generation, literature review, hypothesis formulation, data collection and analysis that has been proposed by many others for conducting quantitative and empirical research.

However, the context of LSCM research is beset with issues regarding its epistemology as well as its theoretical underpinnings, and which impacts its managerial or practical relevance. New and Payne argued *"logistics is one of the sub-fields of management which like to wallow in its own obscurity"* and follows existing trends by *"evolving into integrated logistics or strategic supply chain management, or any other label which can be generated by combining managerial buzzwords"* (1995, p.60). This argument may be a reflection on the practitioner orientation of some logistics research and publications and is not without merit.

Research in logistics is also difficult as the scope of the domain keeps changing such that *"it becomes less clear what differentiates the subject as a distinctive field and what constitutes valid research questions and investigative strategies"* (New and Payne, 1995, p.61). This epistemological concern reflects an ongoing debate about LSCM being part of other disciplines, such as purchasing and procurement, operations management, operational research or management science, and marketing. Notwithstanding, New and Payne supported Kent and Flint (1997) and Stock (1997) by arguing that LSCM researchers should utilise theories and models from other disciplines to help define and differentiate their discipline. This notion has since been picked-up by Halldórsson et al. (2007, 2015).

New and Payne (1995) presented two issues that might affect the proper implementation of a positivist methodology and quantitative approach. The first is the notion that research is socially constructed, which leads to the dichotomy where academic research that scores high on 'rigour' and 'cleverness' may have a low connection to 'real' problems. This dichotomy between an 'abstract' approach to academic rigour versus relevance to 'real issues' is illustrated in Figure 3.1.
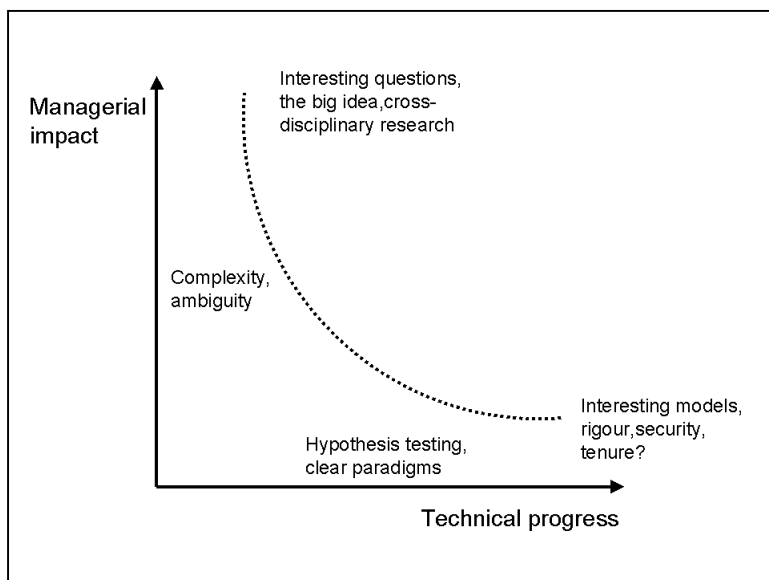

Figure 3.1 Academic research: Abstract versus real issues (New and Payne, 1995, p. 62)

New and Payne's second issue is *"formulation of presumed causal links"* which are important *"because they determine the underlying justification of research questions"* (1995, p.64).

They provided an example of three possible frameworks with different a priori assumptions regarding three dimensions of logistics: practice, performance and environment. The three frameworks and their respective paradigms are shown in Figure 3.2.

Further, as Spens and Kovács (2006) discovered, how research is reported is not necessarily how it has been conducted. For example, longitudinal studies and also abductive research is reported in its various parts rather than including the entire journey to its findings. This posits two problems: First, rigour suffers as the conformity with reporting standards means that the study cannot be replicated – mostly as it has not been done in the first place the way it is described in the paper. Second, 'salami-slicing' means that instead of relevant ground-breaking findings, it is only incremental novelties that find their way into publications.

While not unique to LSCM, this behaviour is not necessarily replicated in other disciplines. The management and marketing disciplines have tried to counteract 'salami-slicing' through the requirements of multiple studies to be reported on in the same articles, which does in part achieve the point of rigorous and relevant research being published, though in other parts, it raises the bar for authors to conduct more studies for fewer publications. Another editor at the Helsinki workshop argued that LSCM researchers need to conduct more longitudinal and combinatory studies to provide more methods rigour and generalisability of findings.
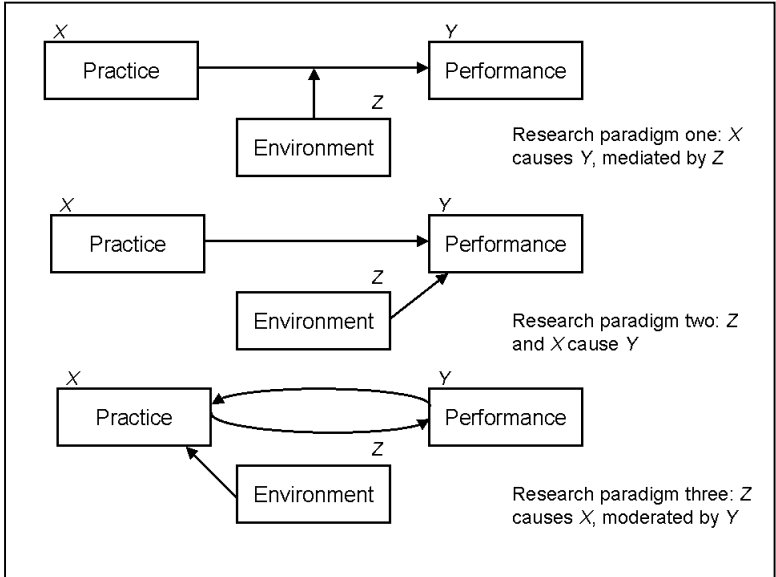

Figure 3.2 Example frameworks for empirical research (New and Payne, 1995, p. 64)

But instead, there has been a preponderance of papers simply presenting systematic literature reviews (Seuring and Gold, 2012) which are considered by their authors as providing rigour because they are systematic and relevant as they address an important research topic. However, these papers are more conceptual and one of the reviewers for this paper noted this trend *"is a sign that something is wrong with the average papers that are being published in the sense that they are too narrow and 'boring'"*, which may indicate there is no meaningful contribution by them. We tend to agree and in fact argue that this paper, being a polemic, may provide more of a contribution to LSCM knowledge despite another reviewer for this paper considering that *"it is interesting to read* [our] *opinions yet that's all it is,* [our] *opinion* [sic]. *It is hardly a relevant AND rigorous research paper"*.

The foregoing issues and concerns are acute in LSCM research because LSCM has to *"address the issue of operational systems which span organizational boundaries" and "present a set of commercial and managerial issues which goes beyond the technical issues of material and information flow"* (New and Payne, 1995, p.67). LSCM researchers are therefore challenged to properly design and apply units of analysis in complex logistics contexts and to properly delimit a study's boundaries. Moreover, LSCM research designs should also consider social and human involvement in LSCM activities and not just consider mechanistic modelling and simulation.

Brownlie and Saren (1997) argued that embedded in the culture of relevance is an understanding that theory and practice are somehow different and that there is a real gap between them that must be closed. They argued that relevance is a quality that is attributed to research that is perceived to bring the worlds of theory and practice together. Piercy contributed a useful line of reasoning for the rigour versus relevance debate, truncating it to two simple points: *"if research is not rigorous, then by definition it cannot be relevant because no-one can rely on results"* and *"if research is not relevant, then by definition it cannot be rigorous, because it fails to meet the basic laws of science and metatheory pertaining to pragmatism"* (2002, p. 357).

However, recent papers we have seen as reviewers seem to indicate that some LSCM and related academics are not adhering to these practices. For example, one author recently reviewed a paper considering an under-researched LSCM phenomenon with three empirical 'case studies' that comprised three semi-structured interviews of three 'experts' who were not identified in accordance with good research practice, but whose expertise was not discussed in any way to provide credibility and appropriateness for their selection. The paper also had some other serious flaws such as 'within-case' and 'cross-case' analyses of the three interviews which led to a rejection by both reviewers for further publication consideration.

The author of this paper who was one of the reviewers queried if the paper should have been desk-rejected in the first instance. The editor responded by saying it wasn't desk rejected it as the intention was to provide an early-career researcher with an opportunity to obtain reviews. Due to the poor quality of the submission, we wonder where mentor or internal peer review was in this situation. We don't believe journal reviewers should be in the business of doing that task.

In another example, a huge database collected by a survey undertaken almost ten years ago has been used to generate almost ten journal publications which contain individual 'tweaks' in the modelling and analysis that are not based on theory or evidence but mathematical manipulation of constructs and variables. Two publications have appeared in the same journal within a space of three years, and we wonder why the second paper wasn't spotted and carefully examined by the editor or reviewers before the review process was complete and the paper published. This latter example also raises issue of ethics as one might consider that the authors are 'salami-slicing' the data to get more publications that simply do not meet the test of rigour, let along relevance if the data are simply being manipulated.

In a third example, one of the authors recently reviewed a paper that provided a Cronbach's Alpha for a two-item construct. The author had to advise that there is no such thing for two items (or measures), only an inter-item correlation which is noted in a seminal handbook on scales and measurement by Carmines and Zeller (1979).

In yet another paper, some citations and references were incorrect in that they included the journal editor or special issue editor as an author of the referenced papers. There is a unique anomaly in Google Scholar whereby it sometimes includes editors in a paper citation. We have to wonder whether the paper's authors actually read and properly used these references

or just inserted them to bulk up their reference list to either give the appearance of better quality or respond to an editor's request to provide citations from that particular journal.

Finally, an article (Brown and Dant, 2008) in the *Journal of Retailing* was proud of the fact that much of the empirical work undertaken in this highly quantitative and modelling-based journal was built on student survey responses at universities – hardly a representative sample of the wider population.

The issues behind these examples are supported by others in related areas such as operations management (MacCarthy *et al.*, 2013) and non- related areas such as psychology (Brinner and Rousseau, 2011; Burke, 2011) and the natural sciences (Sarewitz, 2016). We now take up the various points related to the journals in the next section.

5.   THE ROLE OF THE JOURNALS

For those academics that have a narrow focus and only interested in publishing their work the issue of journal importance becomes paramount. In the UK the research excellence framework (REF) provides a review every six years of the research quality in various units of assessment across a university's faculty. Every research-active academic must submit four journal publications for consideration by a review panel that applies an individual GPA score for each publication averaged for all publications and academics in the unit of assessment for that university. The GPA scores, in decreasing order of quality, are 4*, 4, 3, 2 and 1.

The UK government provides research quality funding to the university for the period between these exercises based on a formula that takes into account only 4*, 4 and 3 rated research as well as the number of academics submitted (REF, 2016). This has led to interesting behaviour at some UK universities, for example one LSCM colleagues at a London-based university noted that every professor must publish four-3 rated and two 4* or 4-rated papers during this assessment period which will end in 2019 or 2020. The ratings are awarded through internal peer review as opposed to the UK Association of Business School (ABS) listing, which is not only used in the UK but has become a surrogate benchmark in other European countries and universities.

The question of what is a quality journal has led to various ranking systems across many countries, e.g. the UK, France, Germany and Australia, and journal publishers have been eager to ensure that their stable of journals are considered to be in the upper categories. LSCM journals have typically not fared well in some of the rankings (McKinnon, 2013) despite ongoing analysis of them by LSCM academics (e.g. Menachof et al., 2009). LSCM academics, including this paper's authors, have worked with the publishers and rating associations to ensure that LSCM journals are fairly considered. In fact, some think that ranking lists should be scrapped as there are other ways of assessing journal quality such as impact factors. For example, the REF panel that considers LSCM research in business and management looked at the ratings given to 1,000 random papers compared to the ABS journal list and found that the ABS list generally overrates journals (Tourish, 2015).

However, impact factors are also used in journal gamesmanship. Some journals have let clouded judgment get in the way of their own rigour in a 'holy grail' pursuit to be considered a 3, 4 or 4* journal. Some have been exposed for techniques to increase their impact factors or citation rankings by self-citations or 'citation stacking' (Davis, 2012), either through regular or special issues, and have been temporarily suspended from Thomson Reuters' Journal Citation Report –including the *International Journal of Production Economics* in 2014 (Davis, 2014).

In 2012 a meeting of biologist academics, unsatisfied with journal impact factor rigour, produced the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) that asks the entire research community to not use journal-based metrics as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, assess an individual scientist's contributions, or use in hiring, promotion or funding decisions. The publisher Elsevier responded to DORA and agreed with a statement made by Thomson Reuters in 2008 that perhaps the most prominent misuse of the journal impact factor is its misapplication to draw conclusions about the performance of an individual researcher (Plume, 2013). Nevertheless, the practice continues as one this paper's authors received a 'revise and resubmit' from an ABS 3 rated journal in mid-April 2016 with comments from reviewers to enhance the literature review with papers from the journal.

The timing for the review process can also be an issue that impacts authors and editors. Some research funders are anxious to see disseminated results quickly and those authors trying meet short deadlines may not put forward a rigorous and complete effort of the research undertaken. However, it adds to the litany of less rigorous offerings in print when the paper is published. On the other hand, the long lead times that many authors face from journals might be an inhibitor to 'waiting it out' to publish a better version. Such lead times may or may not be the fault of the editor or the journal, viz. the comment above about going out many times to find suitable reviewers, however lead times have not gone unnoticed by some funders. Maukola (2016) reported on a Finnish research study into publication output and citation rates for more than 1,800 projects funded by the Academy of Finland between 2005 and 2015. The study found that on average academy funding generated three publications during the grant period and up to one year afterwards, which the authors concluded was a low publication rate. One Finnish academic described the study as correct and rational within the parameters it was designed to assess, but suggested that one improvement would be to look at output for a longer period to assess work published more than a year after a project had ended.

The pressure on editors to ensure their journals are considered high-quality and to respond quickly to author submissions, and the volumes of submissions their journals receive, indicates that some quality control checks may be slipping through the cracks. The new electronic manuscript submission and reviewing software is usually set-up to contact reviewing academics on a regular basis to advise them that their review is due in a week, due today, and overdue. Everyone appreciates that reviews should be done in a timely manner so that authors get feedback, however one of this paper's authors wonders where is academic freedom in light of such continual reminders? That may be an additional 'turn-off' regarding the reviewing process for some. On the other hand, the use of such electronic systems with automatic hierarchical reviewer selection tools helps editors to deal effectively with today's increased volumes of submissions. However, some of the editors have advised that many reviews appear in the week after a 'one-week to go' reminder, suggesting that LSCM academics truly believe in the just-in-time principle.

Notwithstanding, LSCM journals have worked hard for a long time to improve the image of the discipline and the ranking status of their journals. This has finally led to their inclusion in international ranking systems including such as Thomson Reuters ISI, Scopus, Scimago, etc. However, more recently two trends have become apparent: Early rankings of some journals, i.e. less than a five-year period, have skewed their perception and subsequent ranking towards being better than is generally attributed by researchers in their own discipline. On the other hand, now that 'salami-slicing' has become such a trend, citation rates per article are decreasing, and overall there is a downwards trend in the actual citation indices of LSCM journals. If the disciplines continue like this, we will manage to undermine the intentions of improving the image of the field overall.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The issues we have highlighted in this paper are not going away anytime soon. Academics, journal editors and reviewers will continue to receive pressure from various sources to 'do more with less' but also ensure that journal articles and journals are top-notch quality. Such pressures have led some academics to strike up as 'one-man bands' and become isolationist for their peers in the academic community, while some journals struggle with limited resources and may take unnecessary short-cuts. These actions inhibit the research and dissemination process and if continue unchecked may become a downwards spiral that will lead to real credibility issues for both academics and journals that will reflect badly on academia as a whole.

How then can the academic community address these issues? For academics, we suggest developing better time management skills in terms of their workloads so that they can carve out sufficient research time without compromising their duty of care to the wider academic community. Academics, beware that publishing is indeed a supply loop, with authors, reviewers and editors coming from, and contributing to, the same community. Academics can also ensure that they are working efficiently in other aspects of their academic life. A former colleague of one of this paper's authors once remarked that he was teaching one-half of eight courses one year with another colleague teaching the other half so that they both had some variety. That is not an example of an efficiency strategy.

For journals and editors, we suggest to spread the burden of reviewing and editing more evenly, without creating additional steps in the review process that just prolong it. That way the main editor or editor can maintain a closer overview of the process, particularly special issues, and ensure that quality control is paramount. At the same time, perhaps we should follow other disciplines that require entire studies, or several studies to be reported on in the same article – as to say, ensure that there is significant novelty being reported on.

As with all papers, even polemics, there are limitations in this offering. One is that the three authors have similar views towards these issues and so came together to write this paper. Despite our best efforts to avoid it, the small sample of contributors might have led to some 'group-think' in our observations. Another is that we cannot properly evidence some of our examples nor the reviewers' comments (which were provided in e-mails to the authors). However, that is a necessity due to our adherence to an anonymity policy. Finally, we were not cast our net wide to collect observations from others due to time considerations for the NOFOMA 2016 conference. To address these three issues we believe that a substantial piece of research should be developed to more deeply investigate these issues to confirm or refute our observations and inferences.

As academics we do not 'produce' anything except knowledge, as noted in section 3. The principles underlying that production and its subsequent dissemination are rigorous and relevant research derived from a strong theoretical background. The proper adherence to these principles will lead to quality outputs and demonstrate our integrity to others. Our integrity is the only thing we can possess and control as academics, and similar to Zara's fast-fashion strategy for production and retail distribution, 'when it's gone, it's gone' as far as the rest of the academic community is concerned. There is a litany of academics who have lost their employment or indeed their PhDs from the loss of their integrity or who have been banned for life from publishing in certain journals due to their practices and procedures, and we believe it's high-time some academics took a hard look at themselves and others so we can root out and then self-police such behaviour before we are all 'tarred with the same brush'. We owe that to the memory of Tom Mentzer, who inspired many of us and also led the way in addressing these issues in LSCM research.

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