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Evaluate Your Business School's Writings as if Your Strategy Matters

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Abstract: Business school publications are widely criticized for their lack of managerial or teaching relevance. One reason for this criticism is that business school scholarship is typically evaluated purely in terms of one type of work: academic journal articles that are meant to be read by other scholars. However, academics produce multiple types of publications, and business schools serve a wider range of stakeholders. These other stakeholders are often central to the schools' purposes and may be critical in acquiring resources. These stakeholders probably prefer to see scholarship that is relevant for students or for practitioners. They may prefer scholarship that is ethically relevant or regionally relevant and otherwise different from the model that dominates U.S. journals. Technologies are now available to measure the impact of writings in a much wider range of venues than covered by the Social Sciences Citation Index in the Web of Science. Moreover, a wider range of measures, such as the size of writings' readership, may be needed. We consider these issues and present some recommendations,

arguing that faculty evaluations should follow an intentional strategy and not necessarily conform to the traditional default.

Keywords: Business schools; Practitioner relevance; Publications; Teaching materials; Stakeholders; Strategy

"You don't know if the dean can read, but you do know that he or she can count."—Sage advice given to the first author as a junior assistant professor

1. Beyond the scholarly article fixation

You are the freshly appointed dean at your business school. Your first meeting with department chairs includes a debate about types of faculty publications and criteria for merit and promotion. Most of your tenure-track faculty members focus on articles in prestigious non-specialized academic journals, such as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Finance*, and *Journal of Marketing*. However, one department chair advocates for a professor who is a prominent writer in a specialized area—business history—with a new scholarly book from a respected university press. Another chair advocates for a professor who publishes frequently in practice-oriented journals like *Business Horizons* and who has authored a trade book with wide readership. Another chair is worried that a promising junior professor persists—despite warnings—in writing a textbook in the new and growing specialty of social entrepreneurship.

Previously, you had not thought much about these questions. You had always thought that publications ought to be of the highest quality and that this in turn meant articles in the 'top' scholarly journals. It now appears that some of your faculty members have a more eclectic view of publications. Some are interested in specialty research areas that generate fewer citations. Some want to develop new techniques for teaching students about business. Some want practitioners to utilize their ideas to improve business practices (David et al., 2011 and Elliott et al., 1994). How should these faculty members be evaluated? Currently, they are left to negotiate how books, practitioner publications, teaching publications, narrow specialty articles, grants, and other types of research publications will

be counted. You realize that this is neither objective nor fair nor strategically sensible.

The evaluation of business school research often becomes simplistic, focusing on the sole criteria of scholarly publications in academic journals, particularly those in journals that are highly regarded by leading U.S. business schools. We argue that business schools need to become more imaginative, changing both what is counted and how it is evaluated. Like any major organizational change, this will require both top-down and bottom-up transformation. Deans and other administrators, members of promotion and tenure committees, and the faculty members whose writings are evaluated all need to be actively involved (Fragueiro & Thomas, 2011). First, however, they will need to decide what and how to count so as to incorporate the full range of publications.

1.1. Business schools: Walking their talk?

We business professors teach our students that they "must focus on how value gets created for each and every stakeholder" (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010, p. 9). According to a leading strategy textbook, stakeholder management is "an important part of the strategy making process" (Hill & Jones, 2012, p. 28). Applying our prescriptions to our organizations, business school research ought to be responsive to "all our potential stakeholders" (Wright, 2011, p. 495). However, as Boyle (2004) has argued, business schools have failed to walk their talk. Standard practice is to prioritize our fellow scholars as the dominant stakeholders in our evaluation of business school writings at the expense of writings that would be of interest to students or practitioners.

Deans are rightly concerned with accreditation, but you cannot blame this skewing of stakeholder service on accreditation strictures. The major accrediting body—the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)—encourages deans' support of a broad range of faculty scholarship. In fact, in a sample of 41 AACSB deans, "only one dean (from a highly research-oriented school). . .thought that only peer-reviewed journal articles should receive points" for maintaining academic qualifications (Koys, 2008, p. 210).

1.2. Key questions for evaluating publications

As dean, you now recognize the concerns of the full set of stakeholders of your school, not just other scholars. Therefore, you charge a taskforce with the following four questions: (1) Who are the key stakeholders for your business school's publications? (2) What types of publications do these stakeholders desire? (3) How can these publications be evaluated and rewarded? (4) What are the implications for changing your current evaluation and reward practices? Herein, we offer answers to these questions.

2. Stakeholders of the business school

The assumption made in traditional publication evaluations is that the audience of these publications is other scholars (Wensley, 2009). However, business schools serve a broader range of stakeholders. These stakeholders may include students (current and potential), university administrators, alumni, business people, and government or community leaders. Typically, business school mission statements refer to some, if not all, of these interests. Those with AACSB accreditation are required to include at least four stakeholders in developing their statement (Palmer & Short, 2008). We focus on the major stakeholders who are directly served by faculty writings: scholars, practitioners, and students.

The only stakeholders with much interest in academically prestigious scholarship—or the scholarship of 'discovery' (Boyer, 1990)—are scholars. The other stakeholders are more interested in the scholarship of integration, or of practice or teaching (Mowday, 1997). However, these other stakeholders' interests get short shrift in the evaluation process. Their perspectives are neglected even though they are critical to resource acquisition (Thomas, 2007). Strategically, then, exclusively focusing on faculty perspectives is myopic and irresponsible.

For each of the key stakeholders, we ask four questions. First, what influence over resource acquisition do they have? Second, what is their basis for being a stakeholder? That is, following the typology of Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), do they have power, legitimacy, and

urgency or some combination? Third, what might these stakeholders be seeking in faculty publications? Finally, once we have outlined the stakeholders in this way, we ask what strategic choices the school faces regarding publications. To do so, we draw on Boyer's (1990) distinctions between the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of teaching, and of practice.

2.1. Faculty members as stakeholders

Scholars in the school or elsewhere are the most engaged stakeholders, having power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Faculty members are responsible (directly or indirectly) for major school decisions, including resource decisions. They are also legitimately involved and have a sense of urgency (even if they are on a different timeline than the rest of the world). For them, scholarly publications are highly salient (Mowday, 1997 and Stewart, 1995). Publications play a minor role, however, in resource acquisition except for the atypical case of major grants.

Professors are not homogeneous. Some prefer a disinterested scholarship of discovery; others prefer an applied scholarship of practice (Starkey & Tempest, 2008). They can be further divided by disciplinary and sub-disciplinary norms (Khurana, 2007, pp. 283–285) as well as geographical location. Scholars in the same discipline but different countries will have very different perspectives on research. Despite this heterogeneity, faculty members (and doctoral students) are unique for their interest in the scholarship of discovery. This form of scholarship enjoys the highest prestige and earns the highest rewards in the labor market (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 1992, Miner, 2010 and Mittal et al., 2008).

2.2. Practitioners as stakeholders

Practitioners in business and in government can affect both financial and relational support (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003). Most obviously, they can offer or withhold financial donations or governmental support. They can offer or withhold their time in advising, mentoring, adjunct teaching, and other important roles. They can also offer or withhold field research access or data. Clearly, these

stakeholders have power, but their legitimacy is not as clear, nor does it seem that they have any urgency with respect to publications. Complaints about 'irrelevant' research are commonly heard, but seldom do alumni withdraw support because of too much scholarly activity.

Almost by definition, practitioners prefer the scholarship of practice. They might also wish to encourage the scholarship of teaching because superior graduates can contribute to their organizations. These general preferences are not in question; what is in question is their ability to influence evaluations. However, assuming that relatively dormant or less visible stakeholders will remain that way can be risky. Stakeholder interests change, and even apparently remote stakeholders may prove to be impactful (Hall & Vredenburg, 2005). For example, research universities confront new pressures to prioritize teaching over research from "external public policy groups such as the Texas Public Policy Foundation" (Hitt & Greer, 2012, p. 236).

2.3. Current and potential students as stakeholders

Potential students have the choice of whether to enroll, and current students have the choice to stay or leave. These decisions directly influence college budgets and indirectly have an impact because student demand helps determine school reputation through the quality of the student body. However, students' concern with scholarship is modest at best; that is, they lack urgency. Faculty publications play almost no direct role in student decisions—with one exception. High-quality scholarship of discovery will attract and retain doctoral students because these are the students who will read scholarly writings (Finch, Allen, & Weeks, 2010).

3. Publications for scholars

3.1. Types of publications for scholars

The primary forms of publication directed to scholars are scholarly articles and scholarly books. The default option in research-oriented schools is to prioritize leading-edge scholarship of discovery

published in academically prestigious journals, typically from the United States. This emphasis is a natural one in such schools, where scholars themselves are important stakeholders and are recognized as such by administrators. Scholarly books and chapters in scholarly books are the other major form of publications for scholars.

Schools that wish to emphasize impact on scholars can further choose to accentuate particular specialties and therefore prioritize specialized journals. The most prestigious journals tend to reach broad sectors of scholarly readers, while more specialized or regionally focused journals attain fewer readers and limited citations. With a specialty focus, the number of citations becomes less important, and publications or citations in influential specialty journals are given heavier emphasis. Some specialties enjoy widely cited journals (e.g., Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of International Business Studies, MIS Quarterly, Personnel Psychology, Research Policy, and Strategic Management Journal). However, other specialties would reward publications or citations in smaller, less-cited journals (e.g., Business History and Business History Review). Regional publications might also be valued as visible to regional leaders.

3.2. Evaluating and rewarding scholarly publications

Table 1 lists three categories of measures for evaluating types of publications. Category A measures are generally useful, Category B measures are useful if available, and Category C measures should only be used with some caution. Of course, the first criterion for evaluation purposes is simply the number of articles or books.

Assuming that some time has passed from the date of publication, scholarly writings can be evaluated with citations, traditionally employing the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) from the Web of Science. However, citation counts can also incorporate Scopus (Burnham, 2006), Elsevier's rival to the Web of Science, or Google Scholar as well as searches for scholarly books in Google Books or the forthcoming Book Citation Index in Web of Science.

Because evaluations cannot always wait for citations to a work, journal articles are often evaluated by appraising the journal in which they appear. However, article citations are highly skewed, and a

journal is a poor proxy for an article's impact (Oswald, 2007 and Singh et al., 2007). Further, journals' reputational measures are highly limited by perceptual biases and respondents' knowledge limitations (Giles & Garand, 2007). Finer-grained measures, such as expert opinions and testimonials, can be more useful when available. Another useful sign of quality, when it exists, is a reprint of an article in a book. Also unusual but a sign of broader impact is a reference in a practitioner venue, such as on a consulting firm's website or in a corporation's patent.

Scholarly books can be evaluated with similar measures as scholarly articles. Their citations are counted by the SSCI and by Google Scholar. Further, portions of books may be included in other books. In addition, they are often reviewed in journals and are more likely than articles to attract expert testimonials, and they might also be translated into other languages. Scholarly books' sales levels may be a weak measure because such books do not sell in large numbers, but they could prove to be a useful indicator as well.

Despite their limitations, the more commonly used methods for evaluating publications—citations to the works and journal reputation—are widely and increasingly practiced (Adler & Harzing, 2009). Moreover, they have a significant impact on faculty merit pay and job offers as well as the likelihood of promotion and tenure (Certo, Sirmon, & Brymer, 2010). Articles in the so-called 'top' journals are much more highly rewarded than other types of publication (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 1992 and Mittal et al., 2008). Therefore, the current system of evaluating faculty writings is closely attuned to the needs of scholarly readers.

3.3. Publications for scholars: Strategic choices

For research-oriented business schools, it might appear that few strategic choices are needed: current practice does a good job of encouraging this type of writing. However, there are decisions to make about prioritizing scholarly specialties or regionally relevant scholarship. An example of a specialty area that might use this approach is scholarship in social entrepreneurship and development, such as 'bottom-of-the-pyramid' studies (Seelos & Mair, 2005). Such an interest would fit the normative perspective of stakeholder theory

(Phillips, Freeman, & Wicks, 2003). It would also dovetail with the interests of many regional and global leaders. These leaders would be found in not-for-profit organizations and governments, and they might also be social entrepreneurs. Purely as an example, these leaders might be concerned with encouraging indigenous entrepreneurship (Dana & Anderson, 2007).

In addition, research concerning social issues will incorporate a wider range of disciplines than scholarship focused only on corporate issues. The conventional practice of assessing a narrow range of journals—and journal articles alone—leads academics to focus inward with a limited view of their disciplines, which Meyer (1991) labeled as the 'definitive' perspective when discussing the field of strategy. However, much of the interest in the sociology of knowledge today is on cross-disciplinary theory and research (Dogan, 1997), which argues for evaluating scholarly work as widely as possible.

Conventional evaluation systems can be tweaked for schools that wish to serve regional interests as opposed to those in the United States (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000 and Mudambi et al., 2008). A small number of journals expressly serving areas outside the United States or Europe (e.g., Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, Review of Agricultural Economics [from India], and Scandinavian Journal of Management) are modestly well cited, but many others are very sparsely cited in the wider literature. However, these journals offer outlets for region-specific publications, whether they relate to discovery, integration, teaching, or practice. Their stakeholder champions would be government and community leaders as well as school administrators seeking regional prominence. These journals can also be valuable for developing global awareness among any set of students (Kedia & Englis, 2011).

If a strategic goal for the department or college is international or regional exposure, this has implications for evaluation. For this goal, the best approach would probably be utilizing citations. However, the avenue for counting citations is critical. Using the SSCI to count citations would be a mistake for any non-American region. As many authors have pointed out (e.g., Svensson, 2010), the SSCI is strongly biased toward English-language journals. Scopus includes more non-English citations, but Internet citations (through Google Scholar) would

include even more international citations. For example, in searching his own citations, one of the authors discovered that about 16% of the citations to his research are in 22 languages other than English. Virtually all of these citations were found through Google.

4. Publications for practitioners

4.1. Types of publications for practitioners

Naturally, numerous practitioners seek publications that are of use to their business practices. In fact, despite the strong emphasis on scholarly publications in evaluation practices, many business school professors do write for a practitioner audience. They produce articles in refereed journals, such as this one, intended for both scholars and practitioners. They produce articles in the business press and in trade publications. They also write trade books intended for a practitioner audience. They may also produce publications of interest to regional leaders concerned with "the regional availability of knowledge and skills. . .greater links between research and teaching; and more engagement with the end users of research" (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000, p. 475).

4.2. Evaluating and rewarding practitioner-oriented publications

Practitioners themselves seldom publish works that include citations. Therefore, citation-based measures of articles in practitioner-oriented journals underestimate their impact. However, some of these articles do achieve scholarly impact as well. For example, Kaplan and Norton (1992) have more than 1,000 citations in the SSCI, and Carroll (1991)—published in this journal—has more than 250 SSCI citations.

Despite this potential for both scholarly and practitioner impact, practice-oriented journals are sometimes excluded from the short lists of those that count toward authors' careers (Certo et al., 2010, Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 1992 and Mittal et al., 2008). However, several such journals are found one rank below the top in the journal ratings by the Association of Business Schools (United Kingdom) and the Australian Business Deans Council. Therefore, schools may offer

merit rewards for these sorts of writings. In fact, the AACSB deans surveyed by Koys (2008, p. 210) rated a "practitioner-oriented book" at 74% and a practitioner-reviewed article also at 74% (with lower variance) relative to the value of one scholarly journal article.

4.3. Publications for practitioners: Strategic choices

Successful practitioner writers develop more connections with practitioners and become more adept at executive education. Their reputation in the business community reflects favorably on the school. For these reasons, it is in business schools' interest to encourage practitioner-oriented writings. This argument applies most forcefully to top business schools and those that aspire to earn better rankings.

Business school rankings are not based on doctoral programs but on MBA programs. Safón (2009, p. 221) found that at the MBA level, "research performance" has some impact on media rankings, but that school reputation is determined by "the quality of students and. . .media rankings," not by research. The better the MBA program, the better—that is, the more experienced and demanding—are the students. Therefore, top programs have the greatest need for balance among scholarly, teaching, and practitioner-oriented writings. As others (Hughes, Bence, Grisoni, O'Regan, & Wornham, 2011, p. 53) have noted:

The focus on academic publication, as the single metric of performance. . .is further exposed [by their findings] as an inadequate way of encouraging and rewarding scholarship in a field such as management where the theory-practice link is so much a part of what makes it distinctive.

If the purpose of publications is to impact practitioners, evaluations also need other measures than those utilized for scholars. Sheer visibility, measured by metrics of distribution and availability, may be more relevant. A short work in *The Wall Street Journal* may be more significant for practitioners than a longer work in a practitioner-oriented journal. Moreover, notice of these works in practitioner venues will be more germane than for scholarly writings. Trade books are also relatively likely to acquire expert testimonials and may be reviewed in the business press or journals. They can also be measured

over time by their longevity and by translations into other languages. Measuring indirect impact on practitioners as ideas 'migrate' from scholarship to practitioners (Daft & Lewin, 2008) is very difficult if not impossible.

However, evaluating the direct impact of publications on practitioners is possible and necessary. Although practitioners seldom publish works that cite other publications, some government or business websites provide citations. Based on our searches, these are skewed to a small set of agencies and firms, such as economic development agencies and consulting firms. Because citation counts from practitioners will be much less numerous than citations from other professors, visibility is a more realistic goal. One solution is to value mentions—not citations—of faculty members in the business press. A second solution is to prioritize publications that reach practitioner readership, giving extra weight for those that are particularly widely distributed, such as the Harvard Business Review and The Wall Street Journal. A third solution is to count the sales of practitioner-oriented trade books by your faculty (the Harvard model). Finally, a fourth solution is to search for citations in practitioneroriented trade books written by others. Measuring practitioner impact will require creativity, but it is not impossible.

5. Publications for students

5.1. Types of publications for students

Professors write directly and indirectly for students. Indirectly, their scholarly writings are reported in textbooks, and their writings on learning and education (presumably) affect teaching practice. Our focus will be on writings meant for students themselves. The dominant forms are textbooks and teaching materials, such as cases, simulations, and exercises. Other types noted by the AACSB deans include chapters in textbooks, instructional software, and instructor manuals (Koys, 2008).

5.2. Evaluating and rewarding writings for students

Textbooks are less likely than other books to be reviewed in journals, but such reviews may exist. Textbooks also tend to garner expert testimonials in their lengthy vetting processes. Like other books, they can be measured by longevity and by translations (if any there are any). Their most telling measure, however, is sales. Even a modestly selling textbook achieves a scope of readership and notice among faculty and students that is rivaled by few other faculty publications. Case materials, for their part, can also be measured by adoptions, whether they are purchased directly or published indirectly in textbooks. Within textbooks, they may also appear in translation.

5.3. Publications for students: Strategic choices

Just as practitioner-oriented publications can benefit the business school, so too can student-oriented publications. They can bring about improvements in the author's own teaching (Spiegler, 2011) as the textbook author must learn to write in a style that resonates with students, not necessarily with scholars. Moreover, publications for teaching are included among the AACSB activities for maintaining academic qualifications (Koys, 2008, p. 208). In fact, AACSB deans rated a new textbook at 79% of the value of one academic journal article and a "written case with instructional material" at 53% of such an article (Koys, 2008, p. 210). Deans may object that a textbook often takes more—not less—effort than a journal article, and it typically has fewer authors (Spiegler, 2011), and the same point may be made about practitioner books. Nonetheless, these materials are relevant in terms of accreditation, not to mention stakeholder service.

However, these writings tend to get short shrift at research universities (Roediger, 2004). Unlike refereed practitioner journals, teaching publications tend to be forgotten relative to journal-ranking lists. Therefore, the distinctive school needs to compensate for this bias internally if it wishes to encourage other modes of scholarship. The school that seeks excellence in the scholarship of teaching or wants to attract better students needs to bear in mind that what gets rewarded gets done (Kerr, 1975). Therefore, the school that wishes to

encourage the scholarship of teaching should not only reward it but over-reward it. (We are aware of the modest chances that our prescription will be widely followed.)

6. Conclusion: Possibilities for change

What have you now learned about how to count business school publications? Your major takeaway may be the wide range of options that face you. In turn, these must be chosen so as to match your college's strategy. Your strategy itself must fit a range of factors—advisory boards, administrative backing, faculty champions, resources, etc.—for your specific institution (Fragueiro & Thomas, 2011). These local factors play into the political realities of change in any given school. Business schools differ in their potential for excellence in scholarship, teaching, and relevance. They can choose different mixes among these. Differentiation has enabled some schools to improve their resources and their standing (Triana, 2011). As termed by Naudé, Henneberg, and Jiang (2010), there are "varying routes to the top."

6.1. Do not accept default practices without strategic reasons

As a school's strategies and stakeholders evolve, so does the appropriate assessment. However, most schools make the mistake of relying almost exclusively on citations to scholarly journal articles. At one time, there was no practical alternative. At that time, equating 'impact' with citations by other scholars in a set of established journals was natural. Now that alternative measures that are available, there is little excuse for failing to make strategic decisions about what is desired from scholarly writings. Available methods allow for a wide range of strategies, allowing us to evaluate many types of impact. There are many measures that the dean can count. Why, then, does the evaluation of business school scholarship remain so narrow?

As Legge, Sullivan-Taylor, and Wilson (2007) argued, the prioritization of inward-looking scholarship is driven by faculty alone. After all, who else would drive it this way? This situation suits the interests of a research elite among business faculty. The resistance to

change this prioritization can be explained with two arguments from the stakeholder literature. First, scrutiny by stakeholders is required for managers—or professors—to attend to the stakeholders' interests (Chiu & Sharfman, 2011). Students and practitioners do not scrutinize the scholarly literature; they ignore it (Miles, 2011 and Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). Second, business faculty members' stakeholder responsibilities are not self-evident. Stakeholder priorities are ambiguous and call for strategic decision making. As it does in other contexts, this ambiguity offers opportunities for managerial—or professorial—entrenchment (Cennamo, Berrone, & Gomez-Mejia, 2009).

6.2. Count as if your strategy depends on it

As a new dean, you, along with the senior faculty, will be evaluating what the faculty members publish. What will you count? As we argue above, this should depend on your strategy as a school of business. You may want to embrace the business community or your students or regional leaders. If so, what you count will likely change. This change will be difficult, so the faculty will also have to learn to count differently. However, the potential danger of ignoring important stakeholders is high.

6.3. Strategic opportunities

Business schools and universities only change slowly, but those that are able to change face an enormous opportunity. The competitive environment is changing (Fragueiro and Thomas, 2011 and Thomas, 2007). Corporate, international, and for-profit rivals are increasing their share of the business education market (Triana, 2011). If business schools in traditional universities fail to adapt, newly established, more nimble competitors may pass them by.

We would not applaud such an outcome. University-based business schools are far from perfect. However, the business model guiding consultants, corporate universities, and training firms does not incorporate long-term objective research (Miner, 2010). These private providers lack the linkages with scholars in social sciences, humanities,

sciences, and business schools themselves that are found in universities.

The university business school can create and does create scholarship for many audiences. It is uniquely positioned to serve not only scholars but also students, executives, policymakers, and regional leaders (Harrison, Leitch, & Chia, 2007). What it needs is the will and clear strategic thinking. Otherwise, business schools will rightly continue to be seen as out of touch with key constituencies. This is the opportunity and the challenge that confronts the dean and all of us in business schools.

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- **Table 1.** Methods of evaluating publication types

NOT THE PUBLISHED VERSION; this is the author's final, peer-reviewed manuscript. The published version may be accessed by following the link in the citation at the bottom of the page.

Means of Evaluation	Scholarly Article	Scholarly Book	Practitioner Article	Practitioner Book	Text Book	Teaching Case
Reputation of journal or publisher	. C	С	С	С	С	С
Impact (i.e., citations) of journal	С		С			
Impact (i.e., citations) of work	Α	Α	С	С		
Notice in practitioner venues			В	В		
Expert opinion and testimonials	В	В		В	В	
Book reviews		Α		В	В	
Reprints and excerpts	В	В	В			
Longevity and editions		В		В	В	
Size of readership		С	Α	Α	Α	Α
Translations		В		В	В	В
Educational criteria					С	С

A: Generally useful B: Useful if available C: Useful with caution