

Revisiting the rigor–relevance relationship: An institutional logics perspective

Ted A. Paterson¹  | P. D. Harms² | Christopher S. Tuggle³

¹Oregon State University, Oregon

²University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

³University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

Correspondence

Ted A. Paterson, College of Business, Oregon State University, 374 Austin Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331.

Email: ted.paterson@oregonstate.edu

The question of whether academic research should emphasize scientific rigor, practical relevance, or both simultaneously has been hotly debated in HRM research and other related disciplines for much of the past century. That said, empirical investigations of whether these values are mutually exclusive or compatible are surprisingly rare. Moreover, the perspective of the end consumers of research—practitioners—as to what research is relevant has been almost completely ignored. In the present study, we adopt an institutional logics perspective to assess the perceived relevance of common management research findings with two samples of 298 and 143 practicing managers, respectively. Further, we examine whether objective indicators of rigor and manager-rated relevance impact academic legitimacy. The results indicate a positive relationship between rigor and relevance. Interestingly, practitioner ratings of relevance were stronger predictors of academic legitimacy than methodological rigor. Finally, research findings that deal with leadership topics are rated as most relevant to practitioners, whereas job characteristics, demographics, and human resource practices are seen as the least relevant to managers. The contributions of this study and implications for future research conclude the article.

KEYWORDS

institutional logics, legitimacy, rigor, relevance

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Dipboye published “Eight Outrageous Statements About HR Science.” Among these were the claims that (a) rigor in HR research is more façade than reality and (b) HR research is relevant only to academics. This stinging indictment of the HR field questions the success of journals such as *Human Resource Management* that have made it their mission to provide a bridge between the interests of practicing managers and the rigorous research conducted by academics (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015; Hayton, Piperopoulos, & Welbourne, 2011; Zhang, Levenson, & Crossley, 2015). Dipboye’s claims were not backed up by any evidence other than anecdotes and personal opinions, but they can be empirically examined. Although Dipboye (2007) singled out HR research in particular, others have similarly questioned the rigor and relevance of both organizational behavior (Edwards, 2015) and industrial and organizational psychology research (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001). So what is the current state of the micro domains in management as it pertains to their rigor and relevance?

Central to answering this question is identifying a theoretical framework that can best help us understand the interplay between rigor and relevance. Recently, Kieser (2011) suggested that rigor and relevance can be considered two institutional logics that influence the degree to which academic research is perceived as legitimate. Thus, this study draws upon institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008; Zucker, 1987) to explain that rigor and relevance are coexisting institutional logics, or the organizing principles of a field (Reay & Hinings, 2009), which to varying degrees influence the legitimacy of academic research. As such, it is our assertion that the twin directives of rigor and relevance have a positive, augmenting impact (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Peng & Dess, 2010; Walsh, 2011), rather than an opposing (Kieser, 2011; Kieser & Leiner, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012; Kieser & Nicolai, 2005) or orthogonal relationship (Ghoshal, 2005; Gulati, 2007; Palmer, 2006) as others have contended.

Evidence for the institutional logics at work in the academy over the past decades is found in the rise of evidence-based management (Luthans, 2011; McHenry, 2007; Murphy & Saal, 1990;

Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Rousseau, 2006), action research (Susman & Evered, 1978), engaged scholarship (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006), and other efforts aimed at narrowing the practitioner–researcher divide by encouraging either more direct involvement of managers in the research process or encouraging academics to immerse themselves more fully in the phenomena they are investigating. Also, widely read practitioner-oriented journals such as the *Harvard Business Review* have continued to see their print readership rise and have added web and mobile sites offering continuously updated blogs and articles, resulting in the rapid expansion of the quantity of academic research being disseminated into practitioner-friendly terms (Nasalskaya, 2015). Moreover, universities have beefed up their efforts to assist researchers in getting press coverage of their published research, resulting in coverage of micro business research in popular magazines such as *GQ* and *Cosmopolitan* (e.g., Wood, March, 2017). In an attempt to gauge the success of such efforts, we empirically examine the degree to which readership of academic and practitioner journals impacts managers' perceptions of the overall relevance of research findings.

In addition to providing a theoretical lens to better understand the rigor–relevance relationship, we investigate the relationship empirically. The few empirical studies conducted to date have offered mixed results (Baldrige, Floyd, & Markóczy, 2004). Furthermore, the most recent attempts to address this question (e.g., Miner, 2003; Pearce & Huang, 2012) have come under considerable criticism regarding the methodologies used (Aldag, 2012; Ireland, 2012; Stewart & Barrick, 2012). In particular, several of the prior empirical studies of the rigor–relevance relationship use academicians to rate the relevance of the findings for practitioners (e.g., Daft, Griffin, & Yates, 1987; W. N. Dunn, 1980; Miner, 2003; Shrivastava, 1987; Strasser & Bateman, 1984), a practice that seems unlikely to reveal actual practical relevance (Kieser & Leiner, 2011). Thus, the current investigation uses a sample of managers to assess more accurately practitioner relevance.

Another methodological challenge to assessing the rigor–relevance relationship is operationalization. Previous empirical examinations have utilized a subset of management theories (Miner, 1984, 2003), abstracts of selected primary studies (Shrivastava, 1987), selected primary article summaries (Baldrige et al., 2004), selected full published articles (W. N. Dunn, 1980; Flickinger, Tuschke, Gruber-Muecke, & Fiedler, 2014), and blind reviews of articles submitted for publication during a certain time period (Nicolai, Schulz, & Göbel, 2011) to gauge the rigor and relevance of a subset of management research. Unfortunately, each of these methodologies is based primarily on subjective evaluations by academic raters as to the rigor of a particular empirical work. This study, in contrast, draws from recent meta-analytic findings to remove the subjectivity involved with these prior examinations.

Finally, and importantly, we assess the degree to which the institutional logics of rigor and relevance influence the perceived legitimacy of published academic research. That is, we investigate whether rigor, relevance, or both jointly impact how consumers of academic business grant it legitimacy by citing it. One might expect that rigorous research is more likely to be seen as legitimate by other academics, but the impact of relevance on perceived legitimacy is less clear. And yet the empirical link between relevance and legitimacy offers important insight into the allocation of scholarly resources concerning the questions that managers

find most relevant to them. In the following sections, we develop several hypotheses aimed at answering these questions and then detail a two-sample field survey developed to test the hypotheses.

2 | INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS

Institutional logics “are socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Put more succinctly, institutional logics are the organizing principles for a field (Reay & Hinings, 2009). These logics form rule-like guidelines for decision making within the context of organizations and determine the allotment of status, credits, penalties, and rewards (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). In other words, compliance with prevailing institutional logics grants legitimacy to individuals and organizations. According to Friedland and Alford (1991), the major institutions of society—the market, the state, the corporation, the professions, religion, and the family (and Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, add the industries to this list)—each have a central logic and these logics often conflict. Thus, individuals and organizations are subject to the influence of multiple competing institutional logics.

In the realm of academic business research, we argue that the dominant coexisting institutional logics are rigor and relevance. As organizing principles for the field, they provide rule-like guidance to researchers and inform the way that decision makers, such as journal editors, reviewers, and other scholars, grant legitimacy to research by publishing it and then citing it. In contrast to other perspectives that see these logics as competing or orthogonal to one another, we posit that the twin directives of rigor and relevance jointly influence perceived legitimacy and that scholars who can comply with both logics are those whose research will be seen as most legitimate in the eyes of their peers. As a result, we propose a positive relationship between rigor and relevance because research that is not rigorous cannot tell practitioners what they need to know (whether or not they should follow the recommendations being made) because the conclusions drawn from such research are unlikely to be based in fact.

3 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The literature on the rigor–relevance relationship is large and diverse. As an indication of the size of the literature, Kieser (2011) indicates that, as of 2011, there were at least 450 articles that addressed the issue of the relationship between rigorous and relevant research in management. However, despite the sheer size of the literature, as Baldrige et al. (2004) demonstrate, only a very small fraction of the articles have been empirical examinations of the rigor–relevance relationship. Due to the size of the literature in this area, we will focus our review solely on empirical studies and restrict our discussion to those most relevant to HRM and closely aligned fields such as organizational behavior and industrial–organizational psychology. We restrict this review to those articles that reported an empirical

TABLE 1 Summary of empirical research on academic rigor and practitioner relevance, 2003–2014

Study characteristics	Miner (2003)	Baldrige et al. (2004)	Nicolai et al. (2011)	Flickinger et al. (2014)
# of reports used	73 OB theories	120 publications	142 peer-reviewed manuscripts	38 primary studies
Academic quality rated by	95 academics	Other scholars via citations	100+ academic reviewers for a "bridging" journal	Coded characteristics of primary studies
Practical relevance rated by	Same academics	31 practitioner members of the AME advisory board (expert panel)	100+ practitioner reviewers for a "bridging" journal	Coded characteristics of primary studies
Rating criteria for implications, relevance implications	1 item for usefulness	One global measure and two dimensional measures of interestingness and justification	1 item each for practical relevance and practical problem	Theoretical practical
Rating criteria for academic quality	1 item for validity	Citations	1 item each for timeliness, theory, argumentation, originality, presentation, and academic relevance	Size of reported effects, scale reliabilities, number of data sources
Findings	Positive relationship	Positive relationship	Negative relationship for accepted publications	Mixed results

relationship between the academic rigor of an article and its relevance to practitioners. There are only nine articles to date that comply with these criteria. Table 1 provides a summary of the most recent articles (published since 2003); a review of the empirical work up until and including 2002 is available in Baldrige et al. (2004) in a similar format to Table 1. In the four empirical articles published before 2004, two of them demonstrated a positive relationship between rigor and relevance, and two of them reported a negative relationship. Perhaps the most glaring problem with these initial empirical inquiries is that in most cases the same sources (typically academics) were used to rate both the practitioner relevance and the academic rigor. Fortunately, Baldrige et al. (2004) improved upon this methodology by utilizing an expert panel that consisted of the advisory board of the *Academy of Management Executive* (AME) to rate practitioner relevance and citations to measure academic rigor. However, one could argue that even this methodology is not ideal because the advisory board consists of practitioners who have sought out an affiliation with an academic publication and are therefore not necessarily representative of the average practitioner. Despite this, however, one can have more confidence in this study than the prior studies, given this major methodological improvement.

Given these deficiencies in prior empirical examinations and the conflicting results they report, we set out to provide a more stringent test of the rigor–relevance relationship. In the sections below we develop our hypotheses (a visual depiction of the relationships we propose can be found in Figure 1), describe a field survey involving two samples that provided the means to test them, and then discuss the implications of our findings.

3.1 | Relevance to practitioners

Before delving into the rigor–relevance relationship itself, it is important first to consider the channels through which academic research is disseminated to practicing managers and the degree to which this knowledge transfer impacts managers' views of academic business research. From an institutional logics perspective, practitioners can be seen as granting legitimacy to academic and practitioner journals by reading them. To our knowledge, there has not been an empirical investigation of the readership of academic and practitioner journals and the impact that such readership has on manager ratings of relevance. However, prior studies have shown that the degree to which a practitioner finds management research relevant depends on the personal characteristics of

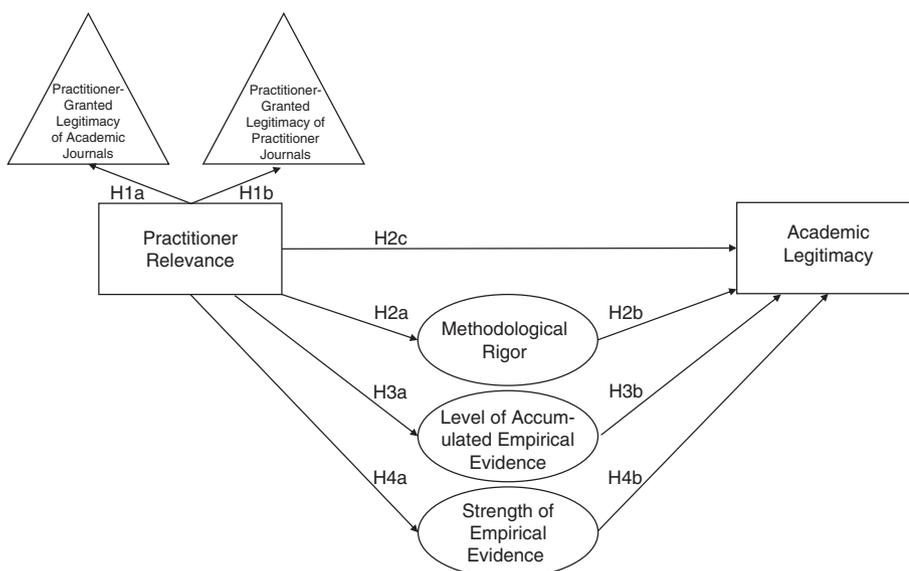


FIGURE 1 Proposed research model

the practitioner, such as education and years of experience (Duncan, 1974; Strasser & Bateman, 1984). Similarly, we argue that managers who grant legitimacy to academic and practitioner publications by reading them are exposed to a wider range of ideas and can more readily make meaningful application of seemingly unrelated research and are therefore likely to experience an expansion of their relevance perceptions.

Hypothesis 1a: *Practitioner-rated relevance will have a positive relationship with the legitimacy of academic journals.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Practitioner-rated relevance will have a positive relationship with the legitimacy of practitioner journals.*

3.2 | Rigor

Rigor has been defined in numerous ways by management scholars. Rigor typically includes any or all of the following components: well grounded in theory, logically derived hypotheses, unbiased data collection, measures that are reliable and representative, and analyses that are appropriate for the hypotheses (Vermeulen, 2007). Adapting an approach used in a prior study (Shrivastava, 1987), three different indicators of rigor will be assessed in the current study: methodological rigor, accumulated empirical evidence, and the strength of the empirical results. Whereas we adopt a similar definition of rigor, this work diverges from Shrivastava's approach in that it uses objective measures of these criteria rather than relying on scholars' ratings.

3.2.1 | Methodological rigor

Methodological rigor is determined by the degree to which hypotheses were tested using sound scientific methods of inquiry. As an important part of the institutional logic of rigor, we assert that methodological rigor will result in more relevant research because its findings are more likely to be sound and therefore of value to practitioners (Pettigrew, 2001; Schendel, 1991). Although a reasonable assertion, the empirical evidence to date does not provide any conclusive evidence that this is indeed the case (see Table 1). However, we assert that with the methodological improvement utilized in the current study, the positive, reinforcing relationship between the logics of rigor and relevance will be revealed.

Additionally, we expect to find that both methodological rigor and relevance have an impact on academic legitimacy. That is, research that is perceived as meeting both the logic of rigor and relevance is most likely to be frequently cited by other academics, thus increasing its claims to legitimacy. Since academicians are largely those who are the grantors of legitimacy in this realm (by citing one another's work), it seems very likely that rigor would be an important factor, especially given the broad and encompassing definition of rigor provided by Vermeulen (2007) above. On the other hand, the degree to which academics take into account the logic of relevance when reviewing other academics' work is less clear. In support of a positive relationship between relevance and academic legitimacy is the fact that most management researchers view practicing managers as stakeholders of their work, impacted through either their research

or teaching or both. However, working against this positive relationship is the view that academicians are too disconnected from practice to know what questions are of true interest to managers (Kieser, 2011). Thus, our hypothesis regarding the relevance-academic legitimacy relationship is more tenuous. Nonetheless, relying on our institutional logics theoretical argument and one empirical case where practitioners were allowed to rate relevance (Baldrige et al., 2004), we expect to find a positive relationship between academic legitimacy and relevance.

Hypothesis 2a: *Practitioner-rated relevance will exhibit a positive relationship with methodological rigor.*

Hypothesis 2b: *Methodological rigor will exhibit a positive relationship with academic legitimacy.*

Hypothesis 2c: *Practitioner-rated relevance will exhibit a positive relationship with academic legitimacy.*

3.2.2 | Accumulated empirical evidence

The degree to which a large body of empirical evidence has been accumulated is another important indicator that the logic of rigor has been complied with because even with sound conceptual development and methodological rigor, spurious research findings can still occur. Thus, replication of previous results is a critical step in providing research that can safely be recommended to practitioners. Especially in light of recent reports that put into doubt the integrity of research in management (see Atwater, Mumford, Schriesheim, & Yammarino, 2014; Banks et al., 2016; Bosco, Aguinis, Field, Pierce, & Dalton, 2016; O'Boyle, Banks, & Gonzalez-Mule, 2014), the need for replication is finally getting more serious attention (e.g., Asendorpf et al., 2013; Banks et al., 2016; Nosek, Spies, & Motyl, 2012). And yet, in one of the few studies in business research that explored replication, the findings indicated that published replications accounted for less than 5% of all studies published in management journals (Hubbard & Vetter, 1996), and it might be expected that this number has decreased in the past 20 years as top management journals have pushed for novel, interesting findings (Pillutla & Thau, 2013). Thus, consistent with our prior hypotheses, and the argument that rigor and relevance are coexisting institutional logics, we predict that the level of accumulated empirical evidence will be positively associated with ratings of relevance.

Also, we expect that meta-analytic reviews based on a larger set of primary studies will be granted greater legitimacy from other researchers. There are at least two reasons for this proposed relationship. First, a more thorough meta-analysis (i.e., one that has included as many primary studies as possible) is more likely to be viewed as an accurate reflection of the current research stream and therefore will garner the attention of other researchers and be cited by them. Second, research questions that have been asked and tested with relatively greater frequency are indicative of an area of research that has piqued the interest of many management researchers. Therefore, there is a greater pool of academics that are likely to read the work in the area and therefore grant it legitimacy through citation.

Hypothesis 3a: *Practitioner-rated relevance will exhibit a positive relationship with the level of accumulated empirical evidence.*

Hypothesis 3b: *The level of accumulated empirical evidence will exhibit a positive relationship with academic legitimacy.*

3.2.3 | Strength of empirical results

Another component of the logic of rigor is that the empirical results derived from an empirical study should be of a sufficient size such that a consumer of the research could expect to see some benefit from acting upon the findings. For this aspect of rigor to be met, the empirical findings must suggest that a certain intervention, treatment, or change in one variable can be expected to result in a substantial change in the outcome of interest. In other words, the implications of the empirical findings must go beyond mere statistical significance and achieve a certain level of practical significance to be truly rigorous (Coe, 2002; Kirk, 1996; Simonsohn, 2015). Consistent with prior hypotheses, and the twin directives of rigor and relevance, we expect that interventions and treatments reporting higher impacts are likely to be rated as more relevant.

Similarly, it is likely that the academic audience is also more likely to grant legitimacy to work that reports larger effect sizes. Such effects are seen as more robust and are less likely to be spurious. On the other hand, it could be argued that large effect sizes could be an indication of a variety of errors and biases in the research design. This can certainly be the case with individual primary studies. For this reason, the methodology used here improves upon previous studies (e.g., Flickinger et al., 2014) by using meta-analytically derived effect sizes that have been corrected for sampling error and other artifacts common to individual primary studies. Correcting for these errors makes the conclusions of meta-analytic analyses a more accurate reflection of the true relationship between variables than primary studies. Therefore, academics are more likely to grant legitimacy to meta-analytic conclusions that report strong empirical relationships.

Hypothesis 4a: *Practitioner-rated relevance will be positively associated with the strength of empirical results.*

Hypothesis 4b: *The strength of empirical results will be positively associated with academic legitimacy.*

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Document retrieval

In determining the number of meta-analyses to include in our sample, we were influenced by two competing factors: (a) we wanted to include a sufficient number such that we would have sufficient statistical power to detect the expected effects, and (b) we wanted to limit the number of meta-analyses such that respondent fatigue would be minimized. Based on these competing factors, we determined that

approximately 100 meta-analytic conclusions would be ideal to try to satisfy both conditions. We started by identifying the top journals in management by using Eigenfactor.org's list of the top 30 most impactful management journals. Then using Academic Search Premier, we searched these journals for articles whose titles or abstracts included the terms *meta-analysis*, *meta-analyses*, *meta-analytic*, or *quantitative review*. To obtain a sample of approximately 100 of the most recent meta-analyses published in these journals, it was necessary to go back to June 2006. Thus, the meta-analyses included in the sample were all published between June 2006 and June 2012. Meta-analyses published since June 2012 were deemed to be too recent, given that one of our variables of interest is academic legitimacy (citations) during the first full 3 years following publication. In other words, we allowed for a 3-year period for meta-analyses to be distributed and begin to gain citations.

4.2 | Criteria for inclusion

Articles were included in the database of meta-analyses if they satisfied three criteria: (a) The article reports a meta-analytic estimate of the strength of the relationship between two variables; (b) the estimate is based on at least six independent samples (i.e., $k > 5$) from at least two sets of authors; and (c) the reported meta-analytic effect size falls into the "micro" domains of human resource management, organizational behavior, and industrial-organizational psychology. Meta-analyses were eliminated if the content was not clearly applicable to these domains. The final sample consisted of 98 (2 of those initially included in the group of 100 were removed because they did not meet the criteria outlined above) meta-analyses and contained articles from nine journals (*Journal of Management*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Human Performance*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, and *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*).

4.3 | Coding of effects

The most highly aggregated effect from each meta-analysis was coded when possible. When a meta-analysis did not provide a single, summary effect, effects were selected that have been studied with higher relative frequency and that have not yet been captured in previously coded meta-analyses. The statistics coded from each meta-analysis included the mean uncorrected correlation r , the estimated population correlation (i.e., p), the number of independent samples (k), and the overall sample size (N). Coding and double-coding were used to ensure the accuracy of the database. Following the first round of coding, the entire sample of meta-analyses was recoded to ensure the accuracy of the coded values used in the analyses (r , p , k , N).

4.4 | Measures

4.4.1 | Relevance

Each meta-analytic conclusion was presented in random order to survey participants using an online survey via Qualtrics. Upon reading the meta-analytic conclusion, participants were asked to rate how

relevant that particular research finding was to their job as a manager or supervisor. Respondents chose among five response options ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*.

4.4.2 | Practitioner-granted legitimacy of academic journals

Respondents were asked to report the frequency (1 = never, 2 = less than once a year, 3 = once a year, 4 = 2–3 times a year, 5 = once a month, 6 = 2–3 times a month, 7 = weekly or more often) with which they read 11 of the top management journals (same list of journals from the Criteria for Inclusion section plus *Journal of Management Studies* and *Organization Studies*). Then an average score was computed across the 11 journals to compute the readership of academic journals score.

4.4.3 | Practitioner-granted legitimacy of practitioner journals

Respondents were asked to report the frequency (same scale as used in readership of academic journals) with which they read nine of the top practitioner and bridge journals (*Academy of Management Perspectives*, *Business Horizons*, *California Management Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Human Resource Management*, *McKinsey Quarterly*, *Organizational Dynamics*, *Outlook*, and *Sloan Management Review*). Then an average score was computed across the nine journals to compute the readership of academic journals score.

4.4.4 | Academic legitimacy

The Web of Science database was used to determine the number of citations that each of the meta-analytic articles had received each year since its publication through December 31, 2015. With this annual citation information, we calculated the total number of citations received by each meta-analysis in the first 3 full years following the year of publication.

4.4.5 | Strength of empirical evidence

The overall effect size reported in the meta-analysis was used as an indicator of the strength of empirical evidence. The overall effect size can be thought of as indexing the robustness of the research finding and the likelihood that the relationship is of practical significance. That is, it communicates practical significance (whether the phenomena occurs) but not necessarily practical relevance.

4.4.6 | Methodological rigor

Statistical power is used here as an indicator of methodological rigor. Statistical power is important because it can help researchers avoid reporting spurious results as conclusive (Fraley & Vazire, 2014). In other words, researchers who consider issues of statistical power before conducting their research are more likely to detect meaningful effects, and thus a consumer of research can be more confident in the reported findings. Because of this, statistical power is a good indicator of methodological rigor. We employed the following methodology to calculate the statistical power associated with each of the meta-analytic conclusions: the uncorrected mean correlations were used, along with the sample size, to calculate the average statistical

power of the average study reported in the meta-analytic conclusion at $\beta = .80$. Consequently, rigor is being assessed based on the quality of the individual studies in a body of literature rather than of the meta-analysis itself (which tend to have high statistical power so long as sufficient studies are used to create meta-analytic estimates).

4.4.7 | Accumulated empirical evidence

Each meta-analytic conclusion had a corresponding k value that represents the number of primary studies included in the meta-analysis. This value was coded and included as the indicator of accumulated empirical evidence in subsequent analyses. In a sense, this variable represents the quantity of evidence, while statistical power can be thought of as being an indicator of the quality of the evidence.

4.4.8 | Control variables

The ranking of the journal in which an article is published has been shown to have an impact on the citations received by that article (Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007). Therefore, in regression analyses where academic legitimacy was the outcome variable, it was necessary to control for the ranking of the journal where the meta-analytic conclusion was published. Impact factors through December 31, 2014, were used to assign each journal publication a ranking based on the 2014 *Journal Citation Report* (Thomson-Reuters, 2015).

4.5 | Survey of managers

We summarized each of the 98 meta-analytic conclusions into a single sentence that would be readable and understandable to a practitioner. Summarization involved removing specialized language (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviors) and replacing it with more practical language (i.e., going above and beyond the formal job requirements to serve their organization) and stating the findings succinctly. After we made our initial attempt at putting each meta-analytic conclusion into practitioner-friendly terms, we enlisted the assistance of a management professor who is a long-standing editor of a respected practitioner outlet and thus is qualified to offer advice regarding what would be clear for practitioners and what would not. Following a pilot survey with 10 MBA students, we finalized the survey by taking into account their feedback regarding unclear statements, terms they were unfamiliar with, and other difficulties they encountered while taking the survey. The final 98 items in the survey of managers¹ included the following statements: Permanent and temporary workers have similar levels of job satisfaction (Wilkin, 2013); scores on cognitive ability tests tend to increase with subsequent tests (Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, & Moriarty Gerrard, 2007); people with proactive (“go-getter”) personalities are better overall performers at work (Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010); individuals who rate themselves higher on integrity are more likely to trust others (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007); and employees who perceive that they are being treated unfairly are more likely to have health problems (Robbins, Ford, & Tetrick, 2012). Managers were given only these one-sentence summaries of the meta-analytic findings. No other information (effect size, sample size, etc.) was provided to them.

Once the survey instrument was finalized, we enlisted a sample of practicing managers using a modified snowball sampling approach. This technique involved the utilization of undergraduate students at a

large midwestern university soliciting full-time employed managers' participation in the study. Students were tasked with sending out e-mail invitations to those in their social network who were known to be in positions of management, and then these managers were also invited to send the survey link along to others in their networks who were also practicing managers. In exchange for their assistance, students received course extra credit. Using this methodology, we collected two samples. For the first sample, 1,121 invitations were sent out, and 426 of these invitations resulted in at least a partial response. To be included in the final sample, however, participants had to rate all 98 meta-analytic conclusions. The final sample consisted of 298 managers (26.60% response rate). The second sample was collected similarly, commencing with 564 e-mail invitations, resulting in 437 people clicking on the survey link and 143 filling out the survey in its entirety (25.4% response rate). Although the response rate for both samples is somewhat low, we are confident that the main reason for this is the length of the survey itself. Because of the way that we intended to analyze the data, for most of our analyses the functional sample size was the number of meta-analytical conclusions, so we could not consider significantly reducing the length of the survey. In sum, to maintain adequate statistical power we had to use a relatively long survey, which resulted in the elimination of a portion of our invited participants.

To be included in the final samples, each manager had to be currently employed full time and supervise at least one employee in their organization. As a result of these selection criteria, the managers in our sample represent a broad swath of managerial positions, from line managers to chief executives. Complete information about the age, gender, and industries of our respondents for both samples is available in Table 2, as well as a comparison to the overall population of managers according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015).

The surveys were administered online using Qualtrics. The survey first asked managers to provide some basic demographic information (education, industry, level of management, number of subordinates, years with the current company, years of experience, salary level, gender, and age). Next, managers were shown 98 meta-analytic findings, given 10 at a time at random, and asked to rate the relevance associated with each finding on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* to *extremely*. Upon completing the survey, managers were thanked for their participation, and their responses were recorded.

4.6 | Analysis

To conduct the analyses at the meta-analytic finding level, the mean relevance ratings were calculated for each meta-analytic conclusion. To justify using the mean rating, it was necessary to check for the level of agreement among the 143 raters. Analyses indicate a very high level of agreement on the relevance ratings ($rwg(j) > .99$). However, this very high level of agreement could be largely a result of the high number of raters (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984). Therefore, we also calculated the two-way random intraclass correlation (ICC[2]), which was .97 (95% confidence interval [CI], .96–.98). Having established the justification for aggregating the relevance ratings, these mean levels were utilized in all of the correlation and regression analyses.

TABLE 2 Representativeness of samples

Demographic	Sample 1	Sample 2	Population
Gender			
Male	58.50	70.63	60.80
Female	41.50	29.37	39.20
Educational Attainment			
Some high school	5.00	5.60	2.80
High school diploma	25.40	18.18	33.10
College degree	46.80	50.35	43.10
Graduate degree	22.80	25.87	21.10
Age	44.70	45.20	44.10
Industry			
Manufacturing	10.00	7.70	10.31
Retail and Wholesale	13.00	11.20	13.65
Transportation	2.70	4.20	5.20
Finance	12.70	9.80	6.78
Health	11.40	10.49	13.49
Leisure and Entertainment	4.70	3.50	9.29
Agriculture and Construction	4.30	11.19	8.92
Technology and Information	3.00	7.70	2.00
Other	38.20	34.22	30.36

Note: Information about the population retrieved from Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015).

5 | RESULTS

Tables 3 and 4 report the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study and control variables from Samples 1 and 2, respectively. Table 3 reports a positive, significant relationship between relevance ratings and practitioner-granted legitimacy of academic journals ($r = .12$, $p < .05$) and between relevance ratings and education ($r = .16$, $p < .01$). Table 4 reports an overall mean of the practitioner relevance variable of 3.69, indicating that, on average, the meta-analytic findings included in the survey were viewed as quite relevant to the managers who participated. The mean of the academic legitimacy variable (93.44) indicates that this sample of meta-analyses was cited relatively frequently in the first few years after they were published. Not surprisingly, we find a fairly strong correlation between the number of academic legitimacy (citations per year) and the ranking of the journal ($r = .35$, $p < .01$).

Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted that practitioner-granted legitimacy of academic and practitioner journals, respectively, would result in higher mean ratings of relevance among practicing managers. As reported in Table 5, Hypothesis 1a is supported, as there is a positive, significant relationship between practitioner-granted legitimacy of academic journals and relevance ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 1b is not supported because the relationship between practitioner-granted legitimacy of practitioner journals and relevance ratings is not significant ($\beta .08$, $p > .05$). Hypotheses 2a, 3a, and 4a dealt with the relationship between the logics of rigor and relevance. Hypothesis 2a predicted that methodological rigor would be positively associated with practitioner ratings of relevance. This hypothesis is supported because the correlation between methodological rigor, as indexed by statistical power, and practitioner relevance is significant ($r = .22$, $p < .05$). Similarly, Hypothesis 3a predicted that accumulated

TABLE 3 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of manager-level variables from Sample 1

Variable name	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Average Relevance	3.44	.86					
2 Legitimacy Acad. Pubs.	1.29	.65	.12*				
3 Legitimacy Pract. Pubs.	1.32	.60	.09	.71**			
4 Education	2.93	.92	.16**	.02	.08		
5 Age	44.70	12.70	.03	-.08	-.12*	.05	

Note: $n = 298$; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

[Correction added on 12 April 2018 after first online publication: table headings have been realigned to correct the data structure.]

TABLE 4 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of meta-analytic level variables from Sample 2

Variable name	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Methodological Rigor	.73	.33						
2 Acc. Empirical Evidence	60.53	92.35	.04					
3 Strength of Relationship	.29	.17	.65**	-.11				
4 Practitioner Relevance	3.69	.42	.22*	-.02	.29**			
5 Publication Ranking	87.06	16.28	.03	.10	.05	.07		
6 Academic Legitimacy	93.44	60.94	.17 [†]	.04	.14	.26**	.35**	

Note: $n = 98$; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$.

[Correction added on 12 April 2018 after first online publication: table headings have been realigned to correct the data structure.]

empirical evidence would be positively associated with practitioner ratings of relevance. This hypothesis was not supported, as there is not a significant relationship between these two variables ($r = -.02$, $p > .05$). The final indicator of rigor, the strength of the empirical relationship, was also predicted to have a positive relationship with relevance per Hypothesis 4a. This hypothesis was supported by the positive, significant correlation between effect size and practitioner relevance ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). The remaining hypotheses are tested using regression analyses; the results are discussed below.

The results of the regression analyses are reported in Table 6. The regression analyses consisted of two separate models, with academic legitimacy as the outcome variable. First, the control variable publication ranking was entered as the sole predictor of academic legitimacy in Model 1. This initial model indicates that publication ranking is a significant predictor of academic legitimacy ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$). Next, in Model 2, the study variables were added to the regression. With the addition of these variables (relevance, methodological rigor, accumulated empirical evidence, and strength of empirical evidence), only relevance remains a significant predictor of academic legitimacy (along with the control variable publication ranking). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b, regarding the relationship between methodological rigor and academic legitimacy, was not supported by the regression analysis ($\beta = .12$, $p > .05$), although there was a marginally significant correlation between the two variables ($r = .17$, $p < .10$). Hypothesis 2c receives full support based on the regression analyses ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 3b, regarding the relationship between accumulated empirical evidence and academic legitimacy, received no support in the correlational results ($r = .04$, $p > .05$) or the regression analysis ($\beta = .00$, $p > .05$). Hypothesis 4b, regarding the relationship between strength of empirical evidence and academic legitimacy, was supported by the correlational evidence ($r = .14$, $p < .05$) but received no support from the regression analysis ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .05$).

The final section of results consists of a test of differences among 19 categories of management research regarding their rated relevance by practitioners. These categories range from job attitudes to human resource practices and are based on the parts and chapters from Locke's (2011) *Handbook of Principles of Organizational Behavior*. The full list of the topical categories is available in Table 7, along with the mean rating of relevance for the category, the standard deviation, and the number of meta-analytic conclusions on which the mean and standard deviation are based. Because the meta-analytic conclusions summarized in this study are bivariate, each conclusion (and its associated rating of relevance) has been assigned to more than one category in most cases. For example, a study reporting the relationship between job satisfaction and performance would be represented in the category for job attitudes and the category for performance.

TABLE 5 Regression results for relevance from Sample 1

Variable	Relevance					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Intercept	3.52	.31		3.58	.32	
Age	.00	.00	.03	.00	.00	.03
Education Dummy 1	-.74	.30	-.19**	-.74	.30	-.19**
Education Dummy 2	-.45	.23	-.23*	-.44	.23	-.23
Education Dummy 3	-.37	.22	-.22	-.38	.22	-.22
Education Dummy 4	-.22	.24	-.10	-.25	.24	-.11
Legitimacy of Acad. Pubs.	.15	.08	.11*			
Legitimacy of Pract. Pubs.				.11	.08	.08
R^2		.04			.03	
F for change in R^2		2.11*			1.68	

Note: $n = 298$; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

TABLE 6 Regression results for academic legitimacy from Sample 2

Variable	Academic Legitimacy					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Intercept	-20.87	31.67		-143.76	57.89	
Publication Ranking	1.31	.36	.35***	1.25	.35	.33**
Relevance				31.56	14.16	.22*
Methodological Rigor				21.29	22.99	.12
Accumulated Empirical Evidence				.00	.06	.00
Strength of Empirical Evidence				-5.46	44.84	-.02
R^2		.12			.19	
F for change in R^2		13.48***			1.94*	

Note: $n = 98$; *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

TABLE 7 Ranking of topical categories based on practitioner ratings of relevance from Sample 2

Category	Mean	SD	N
Leadership	4.00	.53	7
Teams & Groups	3.95	.36	13
Extrarole Behaviors	3.90	.16	7
Perceptions	3.83	.29	15
Interpersonal Processes	3.83	.17	8
Performance Evaluation	3.82	.42	29
Stress & Aggression	3.81	.19	9
Safety & Health	3.78	.23	5
Innovation & Learning	3.77	.33	8
Turnover & Absenteeism	3.76	.10	5
Job Attitudes	3.75	.30	24
Deviant Behaviors	3.74	.36	7
Individual Differences	3.61	.51	19
Climate & Structure	3.57	.09	2
Training	3.56	.29	8
Motivation	3.53	—	1
Job Characteristics	3.51	.52	5
Human Resource Practices	3.24	.35	14
Demographics	3.18	.49	13

There were, however, some instances where the relationship between two job attitudes, for example, was reported. Therefore, this relationship is represented only once in the category of job attitudes.

6 | DISCUSSION

Prior attempts by academics to reveal the relationship between rigor and relevance have been largely atheoretical and subject to numerous methodological flaws. In the current research, we sought to resolve these issues by adopting an institutional logics framework and resolving the methodological issues inherent in prior attempts. First, by viewing rigor and relevance as coexisting institutional logics as Kieser (2011) suggests, we identify how both of these twin directives influence scholarly work in management and the eventual granting of academic legitimacy. From a methodological standpoint, we adopted a

multifaceted view of rigor based on objective indicators. Moreover, we utilized practicing managers to provide ratings of relevance, in contrast to most prior attempts. With these improvements, we hope to advance the conversation about the true relationship between rigor and relevance.

Our findings indicate that practicing managers who grant legitimacy to academic journals by reading them are more likely to see a wide array of academic research findings as relevant. Interestingly, we did not find evidence of a similar relationship between practitioner-granted legitimacy of practitioner journals and ratings of relevance. This is an interesting result, as it seems to indicate that bridge and practitioner journals are not particularly successful at expanding practitioners' views of academic research that is relevant to them. However, it does indicate that there are some benefits to managers of reading academic business journals directly, although the very low mean levels reported for academic journal readership here and elsewhere indicate that very few managers do so.

Consistent with a coexisting institutional logics perspective on rigor and relevance, this study demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between two of the three indicators of rigor (methodological rigor and strength of empirical findings) and relevance. However, there is no relationship between the third indicator of rigor, accumulated empirical evidence and relevance. By finding a positive relationship between two of the three indicators of rigor, this study lends support to those who have argued that rigor and relevance are potentially augmenting (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Peng & Dess, 2010; Walsh, 2011) and appears to challenge the view that rigor and relevance are opposing forces in academic research (Kieser, 2011; Kieser & Leiner, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012; Kieser & Nicolai, 2005). Also, our findings indicate that viewing the rigor–relevance relationship through an institutional logics lens can help advance our understanding of the way in which these twin directives interact to influence academic research practices.

Though the positive relationship between the logics of rigor and relevance is interesting in itself, our investigation of how these two factors predict academic legitimacy also revealed a very interesting result. Somewhat surprisingly, we found that relevance, not rigor, was predictive of academic legitimacy, as measured by citation rates. This is somewhat surprising considering that a cursory review of the academic literature would suggest that rigor is viewed as more

important in academic business research than is relevance. Based on this, we would expect that the indicators of rigor would have a more significant effect on academic legitimacy than would practitioner ratings of relevance. Our findings seem to indicate that this is not the case. This finding is, however, consistent with evidence from other fields that have shown that methodological rigor is unrelated to or even negatively related to journal rankings, which are largely driven by citations (e.g., Fraley & Vazire, 2014; Tressoldi, Giofré, Sella, & Cumming, 2013).

Overall, the investigation of rigor and relevance and their influence on academic legitimacy offered here is evidence that rigor may not be as dominant as previously thought. When compared with Flickinger et al.'s (2014) contrary findings, it appears that, at least concerning the relevance variable, more confidence can be placed in the findings reported here than in the prior article because practitioners were used here to rate the practical relevance. The results reported here offer some encouraging news to proponents of the counterrevolution in management research that have been calling for increased attention to relevance or at least a more balanced approach (George, 2014). It appears from these findings that these efforts have been at least somewhat successful. However, it is important to note that the *R*-squared for the regression model is only .19, indicating that there are numerous other factors that influence academic legitimacy above and beyond the journal ranking, relevance, and rigor constructs accounted for here.

6.1 | What is relevant to practitioners?

While the overall relevance rating for the meta-analytic conclusions included in this study was encouraging (3.69 out of 5.00), these mean relevance ratings varied substantially by topic area. Specifically, the mean ratings of relevance for these categories ranged from 4.00 for leadership to 3.18 for demographics (on a 1-to-5 scale), indicating that there are some real differences among the various categories regarding their perceived practical relevance. Interestingly, human resource practices, often thought to be one of the most relevant of the micro topics, and one that has proven to be associated with firm performance (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Huselid, 1995; Welbourne & Andrews, 1996), was toward the bottom of the list in terms of practitioner-rated relevance. Leadership and teams and groups research, on the other hand, were at the top of the list regarding their relevance to practitioners. This finding seems to echo Rusmore's (1973) finding that managerial behaviors associated with HR functions were often deemed irrelevant or even negative when evaluations for promotions were being made, while "strategic" behaviors such as engaging in long-range planning are associated with a higher likelihood of promotions. Table 7 also includes a column indicating the number of meta-analytic conclusions that fit into a particular category. A post hoc analysis of this column and the mean ratings of relevance revealed no correlation between the two.

6.2 | Implications for practice

The findings presented here provide encouraging evidence that academics can simultaneously pursue research in management that is at

once relevant to practitioners and scientifically rigorous. Of course, just because a particular research finding or stream of research is deemed to be relevant by a sample of managers and appears to have met some basic requirements for rigor, it does not mean that practitioners would have otherwise had access to such findings were they not participating in an academic study. Thus, the issue of knowledge transfer becomes an area of concern. Despite the efforts of both academics and practitioners to bridge the divide (e.g., "bridge" journals, engaged scholarship, evidence-based management, action research, etc.), especially in our fast-paced world, there is a need for much more succinct translations of academia's conclusions.

The methodology provided here, wherein meta-analytically derived research conclusions were translated into a single sentence, could be employed more broadly to quickly and effectively convey basic knowledge about management and human resource science to practitioners. To effectively communicate the findings and summarize them in a way that is true to the underlying research, participation from both nonacademic managers and trained academicians will be required. That is, just as our survey was crafted by academics and then tested for readability and comprehension by nonacademics, a similar method would need to be employed.

Relatedly, this study suggests that efforts to summarize practitioner implications of academic research at the beginning of academic articles, as some journals require, is a worthwhile endeavor even if practitioners never read the article itself because the exercise has prompted the author(s) of the article to consider practical implications. As a result, they may be more likely to look for opportunities to seek media or press coverage of their research and/or consider publishing a similar article in a more practitioner-focused outlet. These efforts are likely to improve the knowledge transfer between academics and practitioners.

In sum, the findings presented here suggest that much of the research that is done by academics in the micro domains of management (organizational behavior, HRM, etc.) are relevant to practitioners and that increased rigor is associated with higher ratings of relevance. This is an indication that, at least to some degree, academics are being fairly responsive to the needs of practitioners regarding the topics they are exploring. Therefore, practitioners are likely to benefit from exposure to academic research findings, but current efforts to do so are likely not sufficient because they are overly verbose or not written up in such a way as to provide the key findings in an actionable format.

6.3 | Limitations and future directions

As with any research, this study is subject to several limitations. First, and related to the above, by providing managers with a survey crafted to introduce them to a series of meta-analytic findings, we have not assessed the degree to which such findings were already known to them or accessible to them before the study. That is, although the managers, on average, indicated that the findings were relevant, they likely would not have had access to these findings outside of our study. Therefore, further research is needed to better understand how management research findings are reaching the practitioner audience and how accessible such findings are to them.

Another potential limitation of this research is the construction of the practitioner survey. Instead of drawing from established scale measures, as is typically done in survey research, this survey consisted of 98 meta-analytic conclusions taken from recently published meta-analyses in the management literature. The formulation of each statement representing the meta-analytic conclusions was subject to some subjective interpretation and therefore may not be a completely accurate reflection of the meta-analytic findings. However, the methodical process through which we created and then validated the manager survey (including pretesting and several rounds of revisions) should alleviate somewhat these concerns.

An additional limitation involves the outcome variable indicator of academic legitimacy. Because the meta-analyses included in the study came from fairly recent publications, there is the possibility that the citations, used as the indicator of academic legitimacy, for the first 3 full years following the year of publication are not an accurate indication of the eventual impact they will have on the field. However, it seems logical that those articles that receive relatively more citations during the first 3 years would also be likely to continue to receive relatively greater citation counts in subsequent years, given the greater visibility that highly cited articles gain.

Given the limitations of this research, and the large and diverse nature of the rigor–relevance literature, future research is needed to enhance our understanding of these topics. Perhaps the most important takeaway from the current research—and one that has significant potential to advance the research in this area—is the utilization of the institutional logics lens. The encouraging findings reported here indicate a utility in adopting such a perspective. Future research is encouraged that investigates more deeply how the coexisting logics of rigor and relevance influence one another, and the academic legitimacy granted as a result. Future studies can look to the institutional logics literature for novel ways of theorizing and empirically investigating the logics of rigor and relevance that were not part of this initial study to further our understanding. For example, historical analyses typical of the logics literature (e.g., Dunn & Jones, 2010; Lounsbury, 2002; Thornton, 2004) could provide interesting evidence of how these logics have been shaped and formed throughout the past century (see Khurana, 2007, as an example).

Moreover, future research should begin to move beyond relevance and look at a higher standard for serving practitioners. For example, whereas the findings reported in this study regarding the rigor–relevance relationship and relevance’s impact on academic legitimacy are quite positive, this does not mean that the majority of management research is *interesting* to practitioners. Clearing the hurdles of rigor and relevance is not adequate on its own for research to be of interest to practitioners. In fact, prior research has indicated that much of academic management research is commonsensical (Gordon, Kleiman, & Hanie, 1978).

Another way to move beyond the focus on relevance is to look at the degree to which management research is actionable. In other words, are management research findings directly usable by practitioners in their everyday practice of management? With the turn toward more rigorous research that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, some have argued that management research became primarily descriptive rather than prescriptive (Khurana, 2007). If this is

indeed the case, it may indicate that much of management research does not have clear, actionable implications that can be implemented by practicing managers. Thus, future research should go beyond the hurdle of relevance to focus on actionability as well. This will provide another gauge of the degree to which management research serves the needs of its professional users.

Finally, in the current study, we presented research findings to practicing managers but did not ask them about their familiarity with such findings before taking the survey, nor did we delve deeply into how they seek out or consume academic research findings. This was an intentional decision on our part, as we were primarily interested in the perceived relevance of the research itself and not how such research gets disseminated, but the latter question is one that is also deserving of further investigation.

7 | CONCLUSION

Contrary to some previous empirical findings and numerous essays, this study reports a positive relationship between rigor and practitioner-rated relevance. However, the strength of the relationship is not especially strong, thus indicating that there is room for institutional and individual work to encourage research that is both rigorous and relevant. Interestingly, and contrary to the prevailing viewpoint, relevance was a stronger predictor of academic legitimacy than was rigor. This empirical evidence demonstrates that the supposed primary and dominant force behind gaining respect from other academics (rigor) failed to predict academic legitimacy when put up against relevance. In sum, this empirical examination of rigor and relevance makes meaningful contributions to the continuing debate regarding the relationship between rigor and relevance in academic management research while at the same time offering new insights in the researcher–practitioner divide.

ENDNOTE

¹Full survey is available from the authors upon request.

ORCID

Ted A. Paterson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4840-9449>

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHIES

TED A. PATERSON is an Assistant Professor of Management at Oregon State University. He received his PhD from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His research interests include positive organizational behavior, leadership, and ethics.

PETER D. HARMS is an Assistant Professor of Management at the University of Alabama. He received his PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. His research interests include the assessment and development of personality, psychological well-being, and leadership.

CHRISTOPHER TUGGLE earned his PhD in strategic management and entrepreneurship from Texas A&M University, and an MBA in management from Missouri State University. He joined the University of Nebraska in 2012. His expertise and research interests focus on boards of directors, corporate entrepreneurship, corporate governance, and strategic leadership.

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