

ADVANCING METHODOLOGICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

Edited by T. Russell Crook,
Jane K. Lê and Anne D. Smith

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
IN STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT

VOLUME 12

ADVANCING METHODOLOGICAL
THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT

Series Editors: T. Russell Crook, Jane Lê
and Anne Smith

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN STRATEGY AND
MANAGEMENT VOLUME 12

**ADVANCING
METHODOLOGICAL
THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

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INTRODUCTION: IS IT ALL A GAME? RANKINGS, JOURNAL LISTS, AND THE CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF BOOK CHAPTERS

T. Russell Crook, Jane Lê and Anne Smith

Keywords: Journal rankings; business journals; book chapters; FT 50; introduction; business school rankings

As researchers, methodological enthusiasts, and editors, we have always had tremendous respect for the *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management (RMSM)* book series. Indeed, that is why we took over editing the series in 2019 (Volume 11). We started by talking to the previous editors – Donald (Don) Bergh and David (Dave) Ketchen – to find out why the series, despite its success in publishing high-quality methodological pieces and being a celebrated methodological resource, had been dormant since 2014. One key reason lay at the crux of it: *It is incredibly difficult to get academics to write book chapters*. Our career structures currently do not incentivize this format of publication (Corbett, Cornelissen, Delios, & Harley, 2014). Yet, when we sat down to further discuss this issue among ourselves – i.e., the editors on this volume of *RMSM* – we all noted that we had written and published chapters, despite the incentive structures discouraging such work.

The discussion among the current editors (Anne, Jane, and Russell) quickly turned into a broader conversation about the current higher education landscape, with research-intensive schools being increasingly focused on rankings and journal lists. As our host institutions, like many other schools, seek to climb the rankings, they have become more systematic in “scoring” faculty research productivity, such that scores are increasingly being driven by publishing articles in journals that appear on certain lists (Corbett et al., 2014). Despite this, as the current editors of the *RMSM* series, our collective feelings remained strong as to

why we have chosen to edit the series, why we have published book chapters, and the value we see in continuing to do so today. When juxtaposed with recently documented problems in the review process, as well as in the confidence of published research more generally, we ask: Is it all just a game? The spoiler alert is that none of the editors think so; even calling the publishing process a “game” seems like it undermines what we, as researchers, do. But, with all this in mind, in this introductory chapter, we briefly describe how rankings and journal lists – or what some might think of as “high stakes games” – have, no doubt, become even more important, and, knowing this, we next offer our opinions on whether book chapters still matter. In the process, we take a walk down memory lane to describe why we believe in the *RMSM* book series, and we also highlight the contemporary role of book chapters more generally, as well as the many contributions made within this volume.

RANKINGS AND THE “STICKINESS” OF JOURNAL LISTS

Many, if not most, research-intensive business schools are obsessed with rankings. A high rank conferred by a prestigious publication, such as *Forbes* or the *Financial Times*, has long acted as a “proxy” for the quality of a school (Devinney, Dowling, & Perm-Ajchariyawong, 2008). A school’s ultimate rank is based on many input factors, including student placement, faculty-to-student ratio, and research productivity, and these rankings help stakeholders make more informed decisions by helping them to more expediently assess school quality. Though many have questioned the validity of such rankings (e.g., Devinney, Dowling, & Perm-Ajchariyawong, 2008), there is no doubt that a high rank helps schools attract vital resources in the way of prospective student and employer interest, as well as alumni support and engagement (Dichev, 2008), to name a few. To be sure, rankings matter.

For many research-oriented business schools, alongside the obsession around rankings, journal lists have emerged as an increasingly important way to assess faculty research productivity expediently (Clark, Wright, & Ketchen, 2016) and have become maybe too important (Harley, 2019). Some lists, such as the *Financial Times* Top 50, describe only the “best” academic journals in business. Others, such as the Australian Business Deans Council’s (ABDC’s) list, capture a wider array of journals and categorize them based on perceived assessments of quality level. And, evidence suggests many schools are leaning on such lists to make important decisions about faculty summer support, as well as promotion and tenure decisions (Corbett et al., 2014). Today, there are several well-known journal lists that have attracted attention and have become influential for assessing research quality and productivity. As well, the journals on these lists are known for their “quality and rigor,” excellent standards, and, as a result, for publishing important work (Corbett et al., 2014, p. 8).

The first well-documented list of business journals was popularized starting in 1990 by The University of Texas at Dallas, or what is commonly referred to as the UTD list. The goal of the list has been “to provide timely data on research

productivity in leading research journals across major disciplines in business schools” ([University of Texas-Dallas \(UTD\), 2020](#); online); the list comprises 24 leading journals that publish business research. This list remains among the most restrictive in evaluating business journal research and publication quality. Recognizing the need to evaluate research quality as inputs into business school overall rankings, the *Financial Times* created a less restrictive list that, until 2007, contained 40 leading business journals. In 2009, this list expanded to 45 journals, and in 2016, it expanded yet again to include 50 leading business journals. Looking at these lists (i.e., UTD and the *Financial Times*), a key takeaway is that each business journal is either listed as a “leading” journal or not.

More recently, a list has emerged to focus on the field of management in particular. This list was produced via a collaborative effort between Texas A&M and the University of Georgia (TAMUGA; [tamugarankings.com](#)), which allowed for an assessment of the top 150 research faculties in US business schools by ranking a school’s faculty vis-à-vis other faculties. In creating their list, the TAMUGA effort took a more granular approach than UTD or the *Financial Times* by highlighting faculty research productivity in “eight top-tier journals in *Management*” ([TAMUGA Rankings, 2020](#); emphasis added). The journals they highlight, such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*, are “household names” to research active management faculty. Like the UTD and *Financial Times* lists, journals are either listed as “leading journals” or not listed at all.

Two other lists have also become increasingly important in evaluating business school faculty research quality and productivity over the last several years – (1) ABDC and (2) Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM). These two lists take what might be considered a more inclusive approach to capturing research quality. The ABDC list was first created in 2008. By the numbers, it is the most inclusive list. Across all business areas, 2,682 journals comprise a list that “reflects currency and continues to assist business researchers to target appropriate, quality outlets for their work” ([Australian Business Deans Council \(ABDC\), 2019](#)). In order to be included in the list, journals had to “contain a substantive business element,” meaning that over a period of three years, journals had to either feature more than 50% business-related publications and/or more than 50% of publications had to be written by business faculty. ABDC journals are categorized into four quality classifications: A* (highest category, representing the top 5–7% of journals; in 2019, N = 199); A (second highest category, representing the next 15–25% of journals; in 2019, N = 651); B (third highest category, representing the next 35–40% of journals; in 2019, N = 850); and C (fourth highest category, representing the remaining recognized quality journals; in 2019, N = 982).

The ERIM Journals List was originally an internal list, created by the ERIM “to contribute to the quality of the scientific output of ERIM and to the academic reputation of the institute” ([ERIM, 2020](#)). However, the list is now used extensively beyond the school, particularly within Europe. The ERIM list categorizes journals into sets, producing lists that cover the whole field of management research but can be filtered for various subfields. The *Primary Set* (P) contains the

best journals in the field of management. Within this set of journals, there are three subsets. The first subset, referred to as *STAR Journals* (P*), consists of the “real top ones among best journals in the field... widely considered as truly distinctive” (ERIM, 2020). These journals are all listed in the ISI Journal Citation Reports (JCR). The second subset, the *Aspirant Journals* (P A), contains journals not yet listed in the ISI JCR but expected to be so in the near future. The third subset, the *Top Managerial Journals* (M*), lists managerially relevant journals, rather than “true research journals” (ERIM, 2020). The *Secondary Set* (S) contains other

...scientific refereed journals of a recognized academic reputation that do not reach the quality levels of the Primary Set... [but] stand for solid, mainstream work in research of management (ERIM, 2020: text in brackets added).

Operating on the basis of the “nonexclusivity” principle, ERIM explicitly leaves contributions to other journals open, stating that:

This does not imply that no credit will be given for publications in journals that are not on the EJL... It is impossible to make an exhaustive list of all the journals in the domain of research in management. ERIM members may also publish in journals outside the core domain of research in management (ERIM, 2020).

Table 1 juxtaposes these lists to highlight that just five journals that publish management research are common across the five lists – *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*. These journal’s acceptance rates range between 5 and 10%. And, despite the articles beyond those contributing solely to theoretical development (i.e., in *Academy of Management Review*) being heavily dependent on innovations in research methodologies, it is a rare occasion when articles whose primary focus is on research methodology are published in one of these journals. While rare, there are a few important exceptions, for example, Langley (1999) on process research methods and Semadeni, Withers, and Certo (2014) on dealing with endogeneity. What is also notable is that, when we look at the common journals, they have not changed much since UTD began categorizing journals in 1990. We thus conclude that these journals lists are pretty “sticky.” Of course, publishing research in these journals is difficult in general. However, publishing methods-oriented contributions in these journals is even more difficult, and most management researchers would not consider the core journals featured on these lists as “research methods” outlets. So, where can you publish work wherein the primary focus is on advancements in research methodology?

The launch of *Organizational Research Methods* (ORMs) in 1998 provided a specific venue for publishing methods-oriented contributions over two decades ago. Although the work published in *ORM* is very important and, indeed, the journal is considered the elite journal in organizational research methods, *ORM* will not be found on most of the “top journal lists.” Despite this fact, it is still very difficult to publish in this journal. Since 1998, *ORM* has, on average, published 4 issues and about 30 articles per year, with an emphasis during its first decade

Table 1. Widely Used Journal Lists to Assess Research Productivity.

	Australian Business Dean's Council (2016)	Financial Times (2016)	ERIM Journals List (2016)	UT Dallas (1990)	TAMUGA (2017)
Journal					
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	Yes
<i>Academy of Management Perspectives</i>	A	Yes (dropped 2016)	S		
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	Yes
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	Yes
<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	A*	Yes	P		
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	A	Yes	P		
<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	A*	Yes	P*		
<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	
<i>Journal of Management</i>	A*	Yes (added 2016)	P*		
<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	A*	Yes (added 2010)	P*		
<i>Management Science</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	
<i>Organization Science</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	Yes
<i>Organization Studies</i>	A*	Yes	P*		
<i>Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal</i>	A	Yes (added 2016)	P		
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	A*	Yes	P*	Yes	Yes

Notes: (1) ERIM Journals List (EJL) 2016–2021; The Primary Set (P journals) contains the best journals in the field of management; S= Secondary. A subset of the journals in the Primary Set, the so called P* journals (or STAR journals), is considered to contain the absolute best journals in the field. (2) The TAMUGA rankings track productivity in eight top-tier journals in management: Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Applied Psychology, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Organization Science, Personnel Psychology, and Strategic Management Journal. (3) Only 5 journals were considered outstanding on every list.

(until 2007) on more micro-oriented researchers (Aguinis, Pierce, & Culpepper, 2009). Recognizing the need for more “conversation” about more macro-oriented research methodology issues, Dave Ketchen and Don Bergh founded and launched the *RMSM* book series in 2004. In the first *RMSM* volume, the founders outlined the overarching goal of the series “to bridge the gap between what researchers know and what they need to know about [research] methodology” to nudge researchers to improve their practice and craft (Ketchen & Bergh, 2004, p. IX). Given the lack of journal space devoted to the topic of macro-oriented research methodology contributions, but their importance to publishing high-quality research, *RMSM* extended the range of possible publication outlets for papers tackling research methods issues.

Yet, book chapters are continuously being lambasted, with even junior scholars actively discouraged from pursuing them. In creating this volume, two

early career researchers pulled out because they oriented toward more “incentive-based” outlets or because their PhD supervisor advised them against it. We understand that, for early career researchers, a book chapter may distract from one’s dissertation or paper focus, and that energy must be used well. With limited time and resources, any focus away from hitting top journals might even be considered “career sabotage.” However, given the long lead times and low success rates at top journals, “safer” outlets like book chapters can be important foundation outlets that allow scholars to build their profile while they work toward their “big hits.” Of course, experienced scholars may also note that books are not always that well circulated, which means that chapters are likely to have a lower impact on a field than publishing in a journal on one of the core journal lists. And, while all of this is true, book chapters do have impact and we really do believe that they still matter.

BOOK CHAPTERS AND RESEARCH CAREERS: REFLECTIONS BY THE EDITORS

To begin to understand why it is important to publish book chapters, for those of you who like lists, as shown, the stability and stickiness of journal lists suggest that there are not that many “homes” for high-quality research methodology contributions. Along with the fact that many of the top management journals ultimately accept less than 10% of submissions, we might conclude that sometimes, you may have something to say that does not fit this restrictive set of acceptable outlets, which means that you need a different venue to find expression in. Book chapters are more likely to allow you this freedom of expression. Many authors who have published in the *RMSM* series, as well as other influential edited books (e.g., various handbook series, such as *The SAGE Handbook of Process Organization Studies*), have made their contributions because they had something that they believe needed to be said. And, in the spirit of responding to [Ketchen and Bergh’s \(2004\)](#) nudge for researchers to improve their practice and craft, we believe that book chapters are and will continue to be important.

We all (i.e., Anne, Jane, and Russell) feel that book chapters helped build our careers. We think of them as individual bricks in our career wall, and at times even see them as the cement that binds these bricks together. Given that we continue to value book chapter contributions, we wanted to reflect on why this is the case in the hopes that will inspire others to also continue to seek them out as outlets! We use our own *RMSM* contributions as the jumping off point.

Anne: I’ve always had an interest in visuals, having noticed their relevance and impact in some of my empirical work. Indeed, I found it helpful to document some of the features of the case contexts I was immersed in through photographs. Although I had the data, there was little on visual methods in the literature at the time, and so the photographs lay dormant for some time, informing my understanding and analysis, but never really central to it. A request by the previous editors, Dave Ketchen and Don Bergh, led me to finally take the time to pursue my interest in visual methods. Writing the chapter together with my colleague

Joshua Ray, I found myself fascinated by visual methods in organizational studies. So, what originally started out as a side project (Ray & Smith, 2010: “Worth a thousand words: Photographs as a novel methodological tool in strategic management”) became a passion, ultimately leading to multiple additional publications, including one in *ORM*. However, the starting point was the *RMSM* chapter – It inspired me, gave me focus, and set a deadline, ultimately giving me the space to discover and develop a new area.

Jane: I often feel like my first publication *should have* been a book chapter. It would have a gentler and more positive entry route to publication than the journal papers that I wrote myself sore on. I only wrote my first book chapter in 2009, years after I completed my PhD, due to encouragement from my wonderful postdoc supervisor – Paula Jarzabkowski. She suggested we write some chapter contributions based on our joint work in order to explore some new ideas, and foster some new research connections, that we would then use to develop more substantial journal papers. That chapter (Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen, & Van de Ven, 2009) has now been cited 229 times – A significant amount more than the three measly citations that my first ever journal paper has been able to attract! Writing book chapters was also less restrictive, both in terms of word count and creativity, so I ended up writing several methods contributions using this medium over the years (e.g. Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2018; Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Spee, 2017; Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Lê & Schmid, 2019). I found it a great way to open up the conversation to areas that were not receiving the focus that I thought they deserved and that remained somewhat nebulous as a result. I also really value these papers as resources in my teaching. In fact, that is why my colleague Torsten Schmid and I decided to produce our most recent paper in *RMSM*. We felt that the methods conversation at the time was starting to congeal around a few basic “templates” and we felt that this conversation did not accurately reflect what we saw in the literature in terms of the diversity that was represented in “state of the art” research. Our paper thus purposefully sought to open up a conversation that was converging. *RMSM* was the perfect outlet for that, since we could produce quite a chunky paper that would give us the room to really develop our perspective and the various “designs-in-use” that we saw within the strategy literature.

Russell: When I published my first book chapter in *RMSM*, I was finishing my PhD. Jim Combs and I had been discussing Venkatraman and Ramanujam’s (1986) influential idea that *firm* performance is a multidimensional construct. At the time, there was not a “go to” source for describing or operationalizing its underlying dimensions, yet Jim had wanted to better understand how firm growth fit into the entire firm performance picture. Having had the itch to learn more about the dimensionality of firm performance, we, together with Chris Shook, set out to understand this, eventually writing the Combs, Crook, and Shook (2005) *RMSM* paper “The dimensionality of organizational performance and its implications for strategic management research.” Looking back, we just had “something to say” about what is widely considered to be the most important dependent variable in strategic management research: Organizational performance. We built on Venkatraman and Ramanujam’s work (1986) in an attempt to advance

thinking about the implications of organizational performance being a multidimensional construct. In particular, we tried to conceptually and empirically establish three dimensions of performance involving for profit organizations – (1) accounting/financial (e.g., returns on assets), (2) stock market (e.g., Tobin's Q), and (3) growth (e.g., year-over-year sales growth). The chapter also noted that there are important conceptual and empirical differences between firm- and operational-performance outcomes, observing that operational outcomes (e.g., improved technology outcomes, such as number of new products), play important roles in shaping firm-level outcomes. Despite being “only” a book chapter, it has become a reasonably influential piece of work – attracting over 550 citations as of this writing. So, we are glad that Dave Ketchen and Don Bergh gave us the opportunity to write our chapter; it offered an opportunity for us to study a topic that had been on our minds for quite some time.

In short, we value our own book chapters and other book chapter contributions. That is why we edit this series. We believe that book chapter contributions provide opportunity and value that is different from, and complementary to, journal articles. Indeed, we know that many book chapters in *RMSM* have had tremendous impact. For instance, the paper by [Ann Langley and Charazad Abdallah \(2011\)](#) on “templates and turns” in qualitative research has been cited more than 350 times. The contribution on visual methods by Anne Smith and Josh Ray, and its subsequent contributions, is now often cited as “seminal” work in visual methods. There are many examples of excellent impact in book series like *RMSM*. Indeed, it is not only a high-quality outlet but also a useful entry pathway to scholars starting out in their careers. Look, for instance, at the fantastic and innovative piece that Indira Kjellstrand contributed to this volume – she was able to produce this piece of work despite being in her first job, with a heavy teaching load. Book chapters also are not restricted in acceptance rates the same way that journals are; so while the top journals often have an acceptance rate of 10% or less, book chapter acceptance tends to be closer to 50%. The key in such contributions is the impact and novelty of the idea, rather than the production of a perfectly polished piece of work. This allows access to publication for a broader range of scholars, allowing them build their profiles, while also targeting work to journals.

We find that book series like *RMSM* provide a critical outlet to new and established scholars by giving them the opportunity to more deeply explore methodology issues that (1) are not finding space in journals, (2) diverge from the norm in broaching controversial ideas, (3) delve more deeply into particular issues in ways that restrictive journal word counts and page limitations cannot allow, and (4) explore new ideas by taking hunches to the next step. These are all noble ventures. That is why, in rounding out this volume, we decided to reflect on why book chapters are an integral part of the academic career, whether they are formally recognized in institutional incentive schemes or not.

Like the organizational performance chapter just mentioned (i.e., [Combs et al., 2005](#)), which was started when one of the coauthors had not yet earned his PhD, book chapters also represent a way to help get careers started. As a colleague and former *RMSM* volume editor, Jeremy Short, likes to say, writing