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Editorial: Advancing the field of entrepreneurship: The primacy of unequivocal “A” level entrepreneurship journals



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ABSTRACT

In this editorial, I seek to inform entrepreneurship scholars about the significance of unequivocal “A” level entrepreneurship journals for the continued ascent of entrepreneurship as a universally recognized “mainstream” academic field. Drawing insights from research on intellectual movements and the evolution of academic fields, I take stock of entrepreneurship as a community of scholars mobilizing elements of distinctiveness and legitimacy to elevate the status of the field. Doing so, I offer three field level observations on the primacy of unequivocal “A” journals for advancing the field. I then delineate a set of role related implications for members of the community, including authors, senior scholars, and newcomers to the field. Finally, I entertain some common objections to emphasizing journal status as a mechanism in entrepreneurship’s upsurge to “mainstream” academic field.

1. Introduction

Academic fields are scholarly arenas where activities such as research, teaching, and outreach are carried out according to accepted norms and rules established by a community organized around phenomena that are distinct from those in adjacent spaces (Bourdieu, 1988; Cole, 1983; Joy et al., 2018). The rise of new academic fields is an intriguing area of research, and a key insight from this work is that academic fields tend to follow a relatively predictable pattern in their emergence, propagation, and in some cases, extinction.

Merton (1973), for example, provided a portrayal of the rise of sociology as an academic field. He argued that differentiation and legitimacy building were two interlocked activities that propelled sociologies ascent. Likewise, McKinley (2010, p. 47) took stock of the field of organization theory and proposed that “achieving consensus on the validity status of theories” was in the early days a dominate goal that energized the rise of the discipline. Flipping the coin, Hambrick and Chen (2008) cite international business as a case where scholars failed to coalesce around core phenomena and therein, faltered in legitimacy building which undercut the mobilization of international business as a distinct academic field.

These insights hold lessons for the scholarly community of entrepreneurship. A small but valuable stream of studies have reflected on the history and emergence of entrepreneurship as an academic field (e.g., Aldrich, 2012; Hebert and Link, 2009; Katz, 2008; Kuratko, 2005; Landström et al., 2012). The distinctiveness and legitimacy events chronicled in these accounts suggest that entrepreneurship has fully “emerged” as an academic discipline. And while the discipline’s ascent continues through strong growth in community membership, entrepreneurship is a young discipline that is still fighting for universal recognition as a fully legitimized academic field (McMullen, 2019). We do not yet enjoy the stability that long tenured fields such as economics, sociology, psychology or even management studies, do. While entrepreneurship scholars have noted advancements toward this end vis-à-vis describing the

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field as increasingly formalized (Aldrich, 2012) and on the “way to creating a knowledge base of its own with distinct research specialties” (Landström et al., 2012, p.1172), they also point to challenges such as the field’s tradition of “borrowing concepts from main stream disciplines” (Landström et al., 2012, p.1157) which tends to fuel conceptual fragmentation (Ferreira et al., 2019; Zahra, 2005). A striking feature of these characterizations is that authors frequently refer to “mainstream disciplines” as a contrast to entrepreneurship, meaning that even community insiders do not see entrepreneurship as having reached mainstream discipline status.

What can be done to change this, or more accurately, accelerate change that is already underway? Research on the rise of academic fields indicates that a key accelerator in the ascent to mainstream status is the presence of a discipline specific unequivocal “A” level journal(s). Hambrick and Chen (2008), for example, find that the absence of an elite level journal raises question of legitimacy in the eyes of outsiders and creates hesitancy among insiders to fully commit to the field. In other words, history tells us that without an unequivocal “A” level journal, scholarly communities experience difficulty in elevating and propagating their status as a universally recognized and fully legitimized academic field (i.e., mainstream discipline).

This serves as a signal flare for the field of entrepreneurship. Despite three dedicated entrepreneurship journals—Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, and Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal—residing in the Financial Times 50(FT50), none of them have reached universally recognized unequivocal “A” level status. That is, they are not widely seen by scholars in adjacent fields, by university administrators, and by promotion and tenure committees, as ostensibly the “highest-quality” outlets available. McMullen (2019) lays out a strong data-driven case for why this is a perceptual rather than factual reality. Entrepreneurship journal impact factors “have exceeded unequivocal ‘A’ journals within and across departments of the business school for several years” (McMullen, 2019, p. 414) and should be considered on par with premier journals in adjacent disciplines. The argument is a compelling one. Yet, the fact remains that the social fabric within the academy is woven tightly, and we have yet to fully rip it open. In what follows, I offer three field level observations for why this is cause for concern in relation to the primacy of unequivocal “A” journals as an accelerator for the continued ascent of the field. These observations cascade into a set of role related implications for members of the community, including newcomers to the field. I then address potential objections to emphasizing journal status as a factor in mobilizing the field of entrepreneurship.

2. Three field level observations

Scholars have long studied how academic fields initialize and evolve (Bourdieu, 1988; Collins, 1989; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). As a result, researchers have uncovered that academic fields start out as small communities of individual scholars that join together around a phenomenon, a theory, a methodology or some other knowledge entity (Cole, 1983). While such communities are common, Hambrick and Chen (2008, p. 34) make clear that only a select few become a recognized *academic field* - a social system of relationships between scientists who study the same phenomena (Bourdieu, 1975) and by extension, universities “designate positions for its members and grant tenure to its members.” The collective effort and focus of energy required to elevate a community of scholars from special interest group to academic field is enormous and the historical record shows that entrepreneurship’s early movers faced a heavy lift (cf., Aldrich, 2012). Specifically, to become an academic field the nascent community of entrepreneurship scholars had to create an image of what they wanted those in other disciplines to think about them and relatedly, decide the forum for emphasizing advances in knowledge production to outsiders. We think of this as “institutional entrepreneurship” (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006) or “institutional work” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and this is where unequivocal “A” level journals come in. They are critical mechanisms of momentum for academic fields, in part, because they are the forum for knowledge production that create “monopolies of scientific legitimacy” (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 30).

This leads to a first observation. Entrepreneurship has made significant gains, but the field is still jockeying for position within monopolies of “mainstream” disciplines. Just as in economic monopolies, competition is a regime threat, and thus entrepreneurship is not always welcomed with open arms. While outright hostility from members of mainstream disciplines does happen, it is typically subtle skepticism and dismissiveness that reign supreme. These take different forms, but the arguments levied by critics inevitably leads to assertions that, while entrepreneurship journals are “good outlets” and are “important”, they do not compare with unequivocal “A” level journals in the critic’s field. And although we jab with the fact that some universities do recognize *JBV* as a premier “A” journal, they counterpunch with the fact that many do not. At issue, then, is the absence of at least one unequivocal “A” level entrepreneurship journal creates a potential upper limit on the ascent of entrepreneurship as a universally recognized and fully legitimized academic field. While growth in members of the entrepreneurship division of the Academy of Management and increases in the number of entrepreneurship articles published bode well for the future of the field, they carry minimal weight in conversations that happen with university colleagues around issues of tenure, promotion, and merit (McMullen, 2019). Hence, it seems that our efforts to prevail in a sustained battle are truncated without an unequivocal “A” entrepreneurship journal in our arsenal.¹

This evokes a second observation. The absence of unequivocal “A” entrepreneurship journals, among other dynamics, has contributed to a movement where the field is too often relegated to creating “safe spaces” for entrepreneurship scholars. By this I mean that individual thought leaders have leveraged their social capital, often first earned in adjacent fields, to create space in their universities where entrepreneurship scholarship is valued and supported. This is a long running trend. The formation of localized pockets of entrepreneurship research was uncovered by Landström et al.’ (2012) empirical work; documenting that entrepreneurship

¹ I use the term “battle” and other military references as metaphor. Entrepreneurship is oblique rather than direct competition to mainstream disciplines (Hambrick and Chen, 2008) and thus, cooptition rather than conflict is preferred.

is increasingly anchored in a small set of intellectual bases. And efforts since 2012 have likely amplified the effect via an upswing in the creation of departments and schools of entrepreneurship at several universities. I myself reside in a department of entrepreneurship and can attest to the heightened sense of well-being one feels when empowered to pursue entrepreneurship research with impunity. A critical generator of such feelings is that entrepreneurship departments often establish entrepreneurship journals as “A” journals for department evaluation standards, rendering them on par with those in adjacent field such as finance, economics, and management. Departmental journal “A” classifications, however, do not always “scale-up” to college and university level evaluators, making us like an incubator venture that can't survive on the outside. Even if the scale-up of entrepreneurship department “A” journal classification issue is solved, what of the majority of entrepreneurship scholars that do not reside in specialized departments? Do they drown while others float away in lifeboats?

The answer to this question is complex, and may well vary across categories of universities (e.g., large public university versus small private school), but certainly life would be easier for scholars across the spectrum, including specialized and non-specialized departments, if the entrepreneurship journal quality case were settled. We are closer today than ever before. Objective data indicates momentum is strong toward establishing journals like *JBV* as unequivocal “A’s” (McMullen, 2019), and when that day comes, will the safe-space strategy prove effective? It may well be the case that entrepreneurship safe-spaces will do less to advance the field than will widely dispersed advocates for entrepreneurship. Walling ourselves off from critics in silos, via structures such as research centers or formal departments, is equivalent to creating military “green zones” in conflict countries. You can defend your space, but offensive maneuvers are limited. If entrepreneurship is to elevate to mainstream field status, it will require advocacy around entrepreneurship's distinctiveness and legitimacy, and if siloed, such advocacy may be truncated. We may have limited our ability to alter the “intellectual attention space” (Collins, 1989) because we are not part of the conversation in non-specialized departments or other structural entities where the voices of entrepreneurship scholars are needed.

A third observation is that entrepreneurship journals serve as a mechanism for collective action. Academic fields are communities and for communities to hold together, individuals must identify the community's mission and interact with community members to form strong ties (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). In that way, a discipline's journals represent a hub of the community and, uniquely, this hub has a reciprocal flow. Scholars gain recognition and prestige by virtue of their personal accomplishments (i.e., journals in which they publish). Scientific disciplines advance via collective action and collaborative work by a community of scholars (Merton, 1973; Aldrich, 2012). When academic journals founded or claimed by those in the community do well, individuals who have published in them reap reputational rewards. At the same time, and in the ways outlined in my first two observations, the success of the journal bolsters the collective work of advancing the discipline. Entrepreneurship scholars should recognize this symbiotic relationship and leverage it.

To that end, research on the emergence of academic fields informs that prestigious journals serve as a mobilizing structure by providing an “institutionalized channel for information flow among members of the community” and “framing movement ideas in ways that resonate with the concerns of those who inhabit adjacent intellectual fields” (Frickle and Gross, 2005, p. 221).² In terms of the former, journals serve as the repertoire of thought that reflect the intellectual inquiry in a field (Knorr Cetina, 1999) and premier journals, in particular, provide the debating ground for ideas and give rise to the latest intellectual advancements. By “framing” intellectual advancements in ways that highlight the distinctiveness and significance of what is being studied, a representation of the field's domain comes into focus (Frickel and Gross, 2005). This allows “individual scholars to orient their contributions toward common reference points” (McKinley et al., 2011, p. 166) and in doing so, a body of knowledge is constructed that attracts followers needed to support the field and converts skeptics to accept the field as distinct and legitimate. This, however, requires that the body of knowledge meet quality standards. Critics are quick to pull on this lever, but when the work appears in unequivocal “A” journals, there is a presupposition that journals of this status accept only rigorous work. Hence, colleagues “down the hall” are more likely to take seriously intellectual advances when they appear in elite journals. What this means for entrepreneurship is that unequivocal “A” journals provide bedrock for members of the community to leverage claims on knowledge by framing for outsiders the nature and significance of what the field is accomplishing.

3. Implications of field level observations

Thus far I have observed that entrepreneurship continues to fight for a place within monopolies of mainstream disciplines, that entrepreneurship scholars are too often relegated to creating “safe spaces” for entrepreneurship research, and that entrepreneurship journals are at the “hot center” of these dynamics because they serve as an institutionalized channel for knowledge production that frames the significance of the field's contributions. Research on the rise and propagation of academic fields renders these observations impactful, but may leave the reader wondering how this translates to the level of the individual scholar. To address this, I delineate a set of implications for individual roles that members of the community assume.

3.1. Authors on the front-line

Despite tremendous progress entrepreneurship is not yet universally recognized as a distinct and legitimate academic field. Monopolies do not give up power easily. There is a “temporal dominance” to mainstream academic fields made possible by their

² Entrepreneurship courses, market for employment as entrepreneurship faculty, and endowed positions for entrepreneurship faculty are other examples of field level infrastructure that fuel the ascent of entrepreneurship (Katz, 2003; Katz, 2008; Kuratko, 2005).

exerted control over the “material, organizational, and social instruments” that incentivize and reward faculty (Wacquant, 1990, p. 680). Judgments regarding which journals “count” are a manifestation of temporal dominance and a byproduct is that journal ranking lists operate as dictators of academic capital – where an article is published relative to journal ranking is the currency of scholarship (Pettigrew, 2011). Known flaws with journal ranking lists aside (see Anderson et al., 2020), they are an embedded social structure in academia that influence agency by guiding author submissions. In this regard, the absence of unequivocal “A” entrepreneurship journals creates a catch-22 for authors. For journals, such as *JBV*, to reach unequivocal “A” status requires authors to submit their very best work to *JBV*. At the same time, authors may feel pressure to submit that same research to journals in adjacent disciplines that already enjoy that status. While publishing entrepreneurship papers in these journals, particularly wide-scope “A” journals like *ASQ* or *AMR/AMJ*, on a consistent basis demarcates entrepreneurship as the equal of other mainstream disciplines, it has not always translated to buttressing the status of entrepreneurship journals.

A common, but quite problematic, refrain then is that authors will submit to entrepreneurship journals if the paper does not get into an adjacent field’s unequivocal “A” journal. If the argument I have made for the primacy of unequivocal “A” journals for the continued ascent of the field of entrepreneurship resonates, one can see that entrepreneurship journals as a “second choice” is a mechanism for enacting the field’s irrelevance by way of self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1957). That is, authors don’t submit their elite level work to *JBV*, for example, because it is not an unequivocal “A” on journal ranking lists, so *JBV*’s traction toward that status is truncated. It is a self-reinforcing loop where entrepreneurship scholars serve as their own worst enemy. It is time to change the narrative. Members of the entrepreneurship community must fully “buy-in” by adopting entrepreneurship journals as *first choice* author mindset.³ When the phenomena, theory and data are clearly best matched for entrepreneurship journals, an entrepreneurship journal should be the first target.⁴

From a field perspective, this is critical because status is fueled by a combination of novelty and continuity, where novelty garners the attention of those within and outside the community and continuity ensures linkages between phenomena and frameworks (McKinley et al., 1999). When entrepreneurship journals are the first choice, the attention space is bounded (Collins, 1989), creating continuity in the literature which bolsters claims on novelty. Entrepreneurship journals target entrepreneurship audiences as readership, such that papers are positioned relative to conversations in the entrepreneurship literature (Shepherd and Wiklund, 2019). This tight coupling between the old and the new creates a flow that allows evaluators to “see” the novelty of the work. By contrast, papers submitted to journals in adjacent disciplines typically must be positioned relative to conversations in those journals, no matter how tangential they are to the objectives of the current research. Among other things, this changes the language used. Entrepreneurs become “founding team” (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1990), entrepreneurial opportunities become “entrepreneurial endeavors” (Wood et al., 2020), and angel investors become “exchange partners” (Huang and Knight, 2017). This is not much of a concern for individual articles, but at the field level it can undermine continuity because links to entrepreneurship constructs are not clear and in turn, the horizon for solidifying entrepreneurship journals as unequivocal “A” broadens. In these ways, we cannibalize our own success because we feed the temporal dominance of adjacent fields. It is time for authors to recognize the role they play in breaking the cycle.

3.2. Senior scholars as vanguard

Senior scholars have an important role to play in the continued ascent and permanence of the field of entrepreneurship. Scholars who reach full professor, hold endowed positions, and so forth, do so because they have garnered significant reputational capital. The field of entrepreneurship has a rich history of senior scholars who boldly “stormed the beaches” by leveraging their reputational capital to advocate initially for the distinctiveness of the field and later for its legitimacy (see Landström et al.’s, 2012). Like all intellectual movements, the continued ascent of entrepreneurship as an academic field requires activism, and there is a new generation of scholars reaching senior status who can serve as “actors with the capacity and obligation to intervene and affect the course of events inside and outside the walls of the academy” (Mitchell, 1995, p.4). The intervention needed is a push for entrepreneurship’s journals to be universally recognized as unequivocal “A” journals. McMullen’s (2019) call to focus the critics on objective metrics where journals, such as *JBV*, have clearly surpassed peers in adjacent fields serves as starting point. Journal metrics are powerful, but the social dynamics of plausibility often truncate the accuracy of data (Weick, 1995). Hence, entrepreneurship is subject to the same social forces as the disciplines that preceded it (see Kuhn, 1970; Merton, 1973 and others in the sociology of science literature), and we can learn from the past to better shape our future.

In this vein, a key lesson from the ascent of academic fields is that scholarly communities are “reputational work organizations” (Whitley, 1984, cited in Hambrick and Chen, 2008) and those members who succeed do so because advocates of the scholarly community influence social and political processes (Fleck, 1982). This takes more than “verifiable intellectual correctness” (Hambrick and Chen, 2008, p. 33), and senior scholars are best equipped to represent advances in the field to outsiders. A key area of concentration in these efforts is to break down the social barriers that block entrepreneurship journals from unequivocal “A” status. In

³ MacMillian’s (1991, p. 83) notion of “delineating a forum for entrepreneurship scholars” is an early indication that entrepreneurship might someday move in this direction.

⁴ When phenomena, theory and/or data have wide appeal in adjacent disciplines, it makes sense that journals with the widest reach are the first choice. When these conditions are not met, positioning papers for adjacent field journals simply because they are unequivocal “A” leads to boundary overreach (Bacharach, 1989), use of nonsense language presented as theory (Tourish, 2019), overpromising in problematizing (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997), and other issues that diminish the ascent of the field.

other words, senior scholars must lean into the institutional work needed to break through the monopolies of mainstream disciplines that can enjoy a decades-long head-starts. This means advocacy by senior scholars who have published in unequivocal “A” journals in adjacent fields (organizational behavior, marketing, psychology, management) and who have also published in entrepreneurship journals. The idea is that these scholars “swim in both pools” and can attest to the quality of work in entrepreneurship journals. They might, for example, make clear to outsiders that they have published in the unequivocal “A” journals of adjacent fields and that, in their experience, the review process at entrepreneurship journals was equally rigorous.

It is simply no longer the case that works in adjacent disciplines is patently superior to the work in entrepreneurship. There are clearly research studies in the *Journal of Business Venturing*, for example, that are “world class” in terms of novelty, importance, robustness of theory and cutting-edge methods. Senior scholars who have published across discipline boundaries are in a strong position to identify these contributions and to couple them with their own success. This includes, for example, citing exemplar pieces in journal articles, highlighting them in editorials and thought pieces, and drawing attention to them in public forums. These activities push the case for mainstream discipline acceptance within the broader academy.

Building on this, senior scholars who reside in relatively high-status universities (e.g., Ivy League, U.S. state flagship, EU global premier, etc.) have a special obligation for advocacy. Within academia there is a clearly defined status hierarchy of institutions, and this hierarchy has strong impact on what is classified as an unequivocal “A” journal. If academic units in high-status universities move to recognize entrepreneurship journals, such as *JBV*, as unequivocal “A’s”, it accelerates a sea change for the field. Hence, senior level entrepreneurship scholars working within relatively high-status institutions have an outsized role and responsibility. If these actors pull the social levers of change in their universities, it may well have a much greater impact than if those same levers are pulled in other institutions.

3.3. Newcomers operating as boots on the ground

A common assumption is that field level issues are matters that doctoral students and early tenure-track faculty should avoid. After all, their newcomer status does not afford them much power, and they are focused on their own survival. So, why should a newcomer to the field care much about the state of the field and the unequivocal “A” status of its journals? There are at least two reasons: (1) Field level dynamics act as “hidden forces” that impact numerous aspects of one’s academic career and (2) newcomers are a key part of the collective action processes that fuel change in the equilibrium.

In terms of the first reason, the above observation that entrepreneurship is still fighting for its place at the mainstream discipline table means that inter-field structural and social dynamics impact the publishing process, curriculum development, teaching, tenure and promotion decisions, and other aspects of the academic career. These dynamics tend to happen behind the scenes, creating “cosmology episodes” (nonsensical “what is happening here” experiences) for newcomers (Weick, 1993). In publishing, for example, entrepreneurship scholars may draw reviewers from mainstream disciplines such as economics or psychology and while many offer fair and constructive reviews, some exhibit discipline bias. The bias, however, is not overtly apparent because these reviewers cite plausible reasons for rejecting the paper, all the while citing articles from their discipline as supporting evidence. In a similar vein, tenure and promotion decisions involve interdisciplinary committees and because of journal ranking lists and other issues, the processes can be biased against entrepreneurship faculty (McMullen, 2019). We can lament the unfairness of this state of affairs, but a key factor in changing the landscape is establishing at least one entrepreneurship journal as an unequivocal “A”. Hence this is a worthy objective and newcomers have an important role to play.

As newcomer to the field, doctoral students and tenure-track faculty are central to success because they “carry out normal science-like investigations” that further solidify focus on core phenomena (Frickel and Gross, 2005, p. 217). Doing so, they lead discussion at conferences, create new networks, and contribute to discussions that mobilize the ascent of the field. Unequivocal “A” journals reduce cognitive dissonance for newcomers engaged in these activities because the target of these efforts, publication in discipline journals, will not be in question. Doctoral advisors and senior faculty will shift from emphasizing publishing in “A” journals that reside in other disciplines. As many in our community will attest, advice to doctoral students and junior faculty often follow the formula of “you should focus on publishing in top Academy of Management journals because they are unequivocal “A” journals that will better advance your career.” This is sound conventional wisdom given these are generalist journals that cover a range of business disciplines and thus have wide readership, but generalist journals have limitations. In our case, the formula waives away the reality that path breaking entrepreneurship research often resides at the periphery of conversations and readership of academy journals.

Hence, newcomers can help push, where appropriate, the frontier to enact a reality where publishing in entrepreneurship journals becomes a clear pathway to career success, even for those outside an entrepreneurship safe space. Recognizing, unfortunately, that some may have to “lose the battle to win the war” in the sense that one cannot ignore the tenure guidelines imposed by his or her university. Hence, junior scholars may face situations where entrepreneurship journals are not valued, and therein, yield to standards that require publication in adjacent field journals. This is a rational move, but one that does not preclude newcomers from highlighting to colleagues the gains in entrepreneurship research taking place in discipline specific journals, nor does it diminish the need for buy-in and collective effort from junior scholars to move entrepreneurship journals to unequivocal “A” status. From Tiananmen Square to the Arab Spring, we see that newcomers can be a powerful force for social change and their efforts are instrumental for the continued ascent of entrepreneurship as an academic field.

3.4. Becoming mission ready

A final thought for members of the entrepreneurship community (senior, junior, and newcomer), is the need to be mission ready.

That is, just as military officers train their ranks to be skilled and prepared when called to support operations, entrepreneurship scholars need to do the same by *reading* the entrepreneurship journals. Research on constructing contributions (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) and setting the hook (Grant and Pollock, 2011) make clear that authors must position their work within current conversations. It is impossible to know what those conversations are in entrepreneurship, or any other discipline, without reading relevant articles in the field's leading journals. By the same token, editors and reviewers are ill-equipped to judge novelty, continuity, and potential impact of the submissions they evaluate if they are not reading the literature. In my experience as an editor, and in conversation with other editors, there is reason to believe that entrepreneurship scholars are not spending enough time reading the entrepreneurship research.

This leads to a very practical suggestion. Entrepreneurship scholars need to commit to read the stream of work in entrepreneurship journals. To be fair, the number of entrepreneurship journals has skyrocketed (Katz, 2018) and one must be selective, but the point is that scholars must at least keep pace with articles in respected entrepreneurship journals that speak to the area(s) in which they are researching and writing. What scholars read influences what phenomena they focus on and how they study it. If entrepreneurship scholars – senior, junior, or newcomer – spend the majority of their time reading journals in adjacent disciplines, then the “attention space” (Collins, 1989) bends toward conversations in those journals. If instead, members of the entrepreneurship community draw on entrepreneurship journals as their primary source of intellectual inspiration, then those journals play an increasingly central role in the trajectory of knowledge production, amplifying the case for unequivocal “A” status for leading journals.

4. Objections to emphasizing unequivocal “A” journals

The above reasoning may elicit objections from some readers. Two responses may be: (1) high prestige journals create gatekeeper and restrictive admittance problems and (2) unequivocal “A” level status may be only loosely coupled with the underlying objective quality of the research published. First, it is true that as journals rise to unequivocal “A” status the editors of those journals become gatekeepers that hold sway over what is published. This can create a restrictive admittance problem where certain topics may be deemed outside the scope, trivial to advancement of the literature, not sufficiently rigorous, or similar. While the publication process is subject to the influence of editor discretion by design, especially when it comes to determining a study's novelty or importance, the presence of multiple reviewers and their input tends to dilute editor distortion. Further, intellectual movements are episodic (Mullins and Mullins, 1973). They vacillate among core knowledge arenas and various “hot topics” and this truncates monopolistic thinking by editors around issues of novelty and importance. Special issues further diffuse concerns because they introduce new topic areas and are led by guest editors who are informed and supportive of the topic. Finally, the history of entrepreneurship research informs that no individual scholar holds power for very long (Landström et al., 2012). Hence, while there can be restrictive admittance created by editors of high-prestige journals, turnover is built in and this serves as a structural boundary. Taken together, these features give reason to believe that entrepreneurship journals are in a favorable position to mitigate this concern.

Second, some may raise the objection that journal status (i.e., journal ranking) is often a poor measure of the underlying quality of the research published. Indeed, exemplars abound of articles published in “lower tier” journals that are now well-regarded. There is simply no consensus that “journal rankings are highly accurate representations of quality” (Anderson et al., 2020). But they are not meaningless either. Journal rankings equate citation counts to quality, and there are many reasons why this is a problematic. However, cream does rise to the top. Articles that fail to set the hook, lack sound logic, fail to move theory forward, use flawed methods and/or present suspect data, rarely gain traction (Grant and Pollock, 2011). While not always the case, these articles typically get screened out at highly ranked journals, in part, because the prestige of the journal attracts leading scholars as editors and reviewers. High prestige journals are more likely to have editorial boards comprised of highly qualified scholars whose training and expertise fuel highly rigorous peer review processes. Lower status journals tend to struggle to achieve the same level of intellectual capital. Over time, then, there is often a marked difference in the quality of articles published in ranked journals versus their lower tier counterparts. So, while questions around unequivocal “A” status and underlying quality are valid, the practical reality is that scholars want to publish their best work in the top journals and do so with the help of highly qualified reviewers and editors: all the more reason for authors, senior scholars, and newcomers to the field, to advocate for entrepreneurship journals to have their rightful place at the unequivocal “A” table.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Matthew S. Wood:Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Project administration.

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