**Has Management Studies Lost Its Way?**

**1. What is the central paradox identified in management studies?**

Despite a vast expansion of the field and an increase in published articles, management studies face a paradoxical shortage of influential and impactful research. The dominance of "gap-spotting" research, which prioritizes incremental additions to existing literature over challenging fundamental assumptions, is identified as a key contributor to this problem.

**2. What is "gap-spotting" research, and why is it problematic?**

"Gap-spotting" refers to the prevalent research approach where researchers primarily focus on identifying and addressing gaps in existing literature. While this can lead to incremental progress, it often neglects to question underlying assumptions, leading to a lack of innovative and groundbreaking research.

**3. How do institutional conditions contribute to the prevalence of "gap-spotting"?**

Institutional factors like government assessment formulas (e.g., RAE/REF in the UK), university ranking systems, and the pressure to publish in highly-ranked journals incentivize researchers to prioritize quantity over quality and focus on safe, incremental research that aligns with established norms.

**4. What role do professional norms play in perpetuating this research approach?**

The "adding-to-the-literature" norm, prevalent in many management journals, encourages researchers to primarily situate their work within existing literature, discouraging more radical departures and challenges to established paradigms.

**5. How does the "gap-spotting" approach influence researchers' identities?**

Researchers often internalize the "gap-spotting" approach as part of their professional identity, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle. This can hinder intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of more risky, unconventional research avenues.

**6. What are some potential solutions to encourage more impactful research?**

Several solutions are suggested, including:

* Governments: Broadening evaluation criteria beyond publication in A-listed journals to consider factors like citation count and book publications.
* Journals: Prioritizing innovative ideas and originality over incremental contributions and rethinking the rigid application of "rigor" that can stifle creativity.
* Researchers: Cultivating a more scholarly identity that values intellectual independence, risk-taking, and a broader engagement with diverse ideas.

**7. What alternative methodologies can foster assumption-challenging research?**

Two key methodologies are proposed:

* **Problematization:** A systematic approach to critically analyze and challenge the underlying assumptions within a chosen domain of literature, leading to more innovative research questions.
* **Creating and Solving Mysteries in Empirical Research:** Utilizing empirical research not just to support existing theories but to uncover surprising findings that challenge established assumptions and generate new theoretical insights.

**8. Is there a way to balance rigor and innovation in management studies?**

While conventional rigor (e.g., logical consistency, thorough literature reviews) is crucial, it should not come at the expense of innovative thinking. Emphasizing reflexivity, encouraging diverse methodologies, and fostering a research culture that values both rigor and intellectual risk-taking are key to achieving this balance.