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Rise of the most excellent scholar, demise of the field: a fictional story, yet probable destiny

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a fictional narrative about Professor Sackker, the solitary researcher in the field of Sackker Studies, once known as Management and Organizational Studies. Despite its absurdity, the story portrays Sackker's dominance, marked by his inevitable rise with record-breaking publications and citations, stifling competition, and leaving him as the ultimate winner and ruler. Through personal reflections, his story explores his career strategies, provides insights into his success, and explains how he shaped, transformed, and eventually (but unwittingly) destroyed the field. This narrative, though fictional, mirrors real concerns in today's reality: growing inequalities, the dominance of elite scholars, and erosion of meaning in academic careers as a function of hyper-competition. We examine the prevalence of systemic issues plaguing academia. Despite challenges, the article also aims to inspire hope. By illuminating these problems and integrating them into scholarly discussions, there lies an opportunity for change, empowering the next generation of academics.

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Absurdity; dominance; dystopia; hope; neoliberal university; scientific elite

In contemporary academia, a lot has been happening lately, shaking up the very foundations of knowledge production and scholarly recognition. The landscape, once defined by intellectual curiosity and collective advancement, now finds itself impaired by a brutal culture of hyper-competition (Boncori 2022; Fleming 2021). This metamorphosis, fueled by systemic issues, intensifying pressures in higher education, and changing expectations from researchers, has created a new generation of academic elite – the hyperproductive scholars (Ioannidis, Klavans, and Boyack 2018).

As competition got fiercer, traditional academic institutions found themselves struggling to adapt. Lecture halls emptied; if not entirely, most faces and souls within them did so, and universities faced declining recognition and respect. Student absenteeism and lack of engagement have become growing concerns (OECD 2024). Even the most credible universities began to operate as degree mills due to grade inflation and their financial dependency on student tuition for survival, yet, for many students, a college degree no longer brings any economic profit (Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity 2024). Most specialized fields in the social sciences, once the bedrock of academia, are now experiencing a gradual erosion of their relevance (Alvesson, Gabriel, and Paulsen 2017). Knowledge still holds importance, but the old structures of academia

are believed to no longer serve as effective gatekeepers or genuine knowledge producers due to these ongoing pressures. Universities are transformed into publication factories. Publications are all that matter now. They are necessary for building a career, essential for rankings, and crucial for funding. We all must publish.

The thirst for publications, driven by personal ambition and detached from practical realities and global challenges, became the norm in most fields of social sciences, particularly alarming for management and organizational research (*cf.* Aguinis et al. 2020; Tourish 2020). Amidst this frenzy, a select few mastered the art of publication, accumulating prestige and privileges (Fleming 2021). They became the academic elite – the winners, the highly esteemed researchers, the top publishers, and the most highly cited scholars. They are the ones who attract graduate students, readers in journals, and audiences in seminars. They are the gatekeepers, edit journals, lead tenure, hiring or grant committees, and decide whom to hire, or whom to fire. They secure lucrative funding, rewards, honors, and prizes. They are invited everywhere, affiliated with institutions from all continents. They are the synonyms of power in academia. Their voices are heard everywhere.

But is their impact truly everywhere? Do we genuinely care? Do we really read the n^{th} paper of a highly productive author when their $(n-1)^{\text{th}}$ study was an exact replica, except the data were collected in the morning instead of the afternoon? Or do we need to add another variable to the mediation-moderation model after deleting some rows of data in order to find pseudo-significant relationships that could bring no visible benefits to our work, employees, organizations, or societies? Maybe, their influence is overstated. Are they living in the bubble they created? Are they not solely motivated by competition? Why is science still rewarded for individual accomplishments? When a senior scholar publishes hundreds of articles annually, shouldn't we ask questions, challenge the system, and analyze their dominance? Are we merely backbenchers throwing stones, or are there other essential discussions we need to engage in? Furthermore, are there no side effects of scientific dominance and the culture created by hyper-competition? If everyone strives to compete, what will our scientific fields look like? As scientists, if we are expected to think outside the box, why do we all follow the same practices and believe in a system that is more frequently cited as broken? When the hyper-productive keep competing and outsmarting others, how will and could the future look like?

Moreover, if the competition gets even more brutal, and science favors few individuals, then what happens when one ultimate winner and ruler emerges as the 'Most Excellent' Scholar? The era of hyperproductive scholars has brought remarkable breakthroughs but also raises questions about the sustainability of academia and the true meaning of academic careers. There are only a few of them in each field. But what about 'losers'? Are there any losers in academia? Is it as simple as winning and losing? Are those who left academia due to poor working conditions can still be considered losers? Can precarious working conditions, burnout crises, and many other burning problems be independent of this competitive culture?

As the authors of this paper, after many hours of relentless discussions and contemplations about these issues over the last few years, researching the dominance and ideological underpinnings of our teaching and research, and being involved in global academic circles that raised their voices over systemic issues, we decided to craft a dystopian narrative speculating how competition in academia could evolve into a monopolistic extreme, a scenario where a single researcher produces the entire output, and describing the repercussions that follow. As academic competition has been steadily rising across the globe, the number of articles in each issue/volume is inflating, and the productivity – as well as expectations – for an average scientist is skyrocketing, where are we going? Where are the limits?

This manuscript is structured in two sections. The first section introduces a fictional story, the tale of Professor Dean Richard Sackker, the last researcher in the field of Management and Organizational Studies. From being a rising scholar, his career success catapulted him into being the ultimate ruler. His unparalleled success led him to rename the entire discipline after himself, symbolizing the decline of curiosity and the misalignment of academic hierarchies with societal needs. This fictional yet plausible destiny satirically illustrates the dangers of hyper-competition. In the

subsequent section, we, as the authors, present our voices, both personal and theoretical, strongly believing that it is a time of profound change, promising both progress and peril as academia navigates the ways of a knowledge-driven society. We also wish to spark hope in the next generation of academics by highlighting the absurdity and hypernormalization of hyper-competitive academic careers (Bal et al. 2023; Macfarlane 2021).

**Celebrating 50 Years of SIMPLE: Personal Reflections on Career Success
as published in
the Annual Review of Sackker Studies
(Publication date May 2075)**

by
*Professor Dean Richard Sackker
Sackker University*

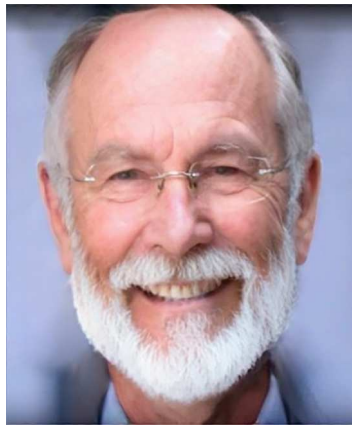


Figure 1. Dean Richard Sackker.

It is with utmost pleasure to share my reflections on my contributions to the field in this personal account and to offer insights into my career success spanning several decades. It is hard to imagine that it was only 50 years ago that the field experienced a relevance crisis, the field formerly known as Management and Organizational Studies (MOS). This broad field encompassed organizational behavior, organizational psychology, strategy, and organizational theory, among others. At that critical juncture, when academia seemed to be under the threat of collapse due to the ever-decreasing relevance of scientific research in MOS, I introduced the Sackker model (2025a, 2025b), a theory and methodology that have emerged from my early years of doctoral studies that revolutionized the field we know today (Sackker 2068). Who would have thought the introduction of SIMPLE© (Sackker 2025a, 2025b, 2028a, 2030, 2031) would mean the whole field would become named after this progressive model, and eventually after me? The SIMPLE© scientific field is now building knowledge in one, unified direction. It is the most reliable and valid model for optimizing behavior in organizations since the '40s (Sackker 2045) and '50s (2058). It is the most effective model, responsible for saving organizations, boosting economies around the world and ensuring worldwide human progress (Sackker 2069). So many birds to hit with one model ...

The Sackker International Model of Performance, Leadership, and Efficiency (SIMPLE©) does not require any introduction. It was published in what was then known as the Journal of Applied Management, which I have later been invited to lend my name after spending several decades editing the journal. Through numerous publications in my own journal, Sackker Journal of Applied

Management (SJAM), SIMPLE quickly reached over one million citations, and it took less than a decade for the theory to be used without even mentioning its source. This is a great honor of course, but referencing remains proper academic practice. I would recommend using the most recent version of the model, including the SIMPLE25© short version of the measurement instrument (Sackker 2050a, 2050b, 2050c, 2050d, 2050e).

How did we get to this point? It can all be brought back to optimizing competition and outsmarting everybody else in playing the game. I can look back and can proudly say: I have won. I am the last one standing in the field. I have outcompeted all others. And, while enjoying the game, I have developed a model that brings it all back to the core essence of it all: performance. It was not easy, but 'I' did it. I, Professor Dean Richard Sackker (Figure 1).

Let me start at the beginning.

Inspirational quote 597 (Sackker 2068):

'My pursuit of personal gain was simply the embodiment of the survival of the fittest, and that my ultimate victory in the scholarly publishing game was proof that I am the fittest of them all.'

1. Early years: starting with cracking the code of publishing

I was born with an insatiable hunger for power and an unquenchable thirst for recognition. As a child, I excelled academically, always striving to be at the top of the class. I was never content with just being good; I had to be the best. I always worked hard. Yet, to be fair, I didn't tread the path of my publication career alone. I didn't start out in academia all by myself, nor was I the only one in my family who understood the intricacies of publishing. I had the privilege of being the only son of Dean Richard Sackker Sr., who comprehended the fierceness and brutality of competition in academia. He wanted to give me a decent head start before I began college, majoring in management. I was the prince of the dynasty my father built.

My father was one of the most prolific researchers of his time, managing to publish over 1000 peer-reviewed articles, of which one-third were in 'A' journals. In his time, this number was considered remarkably high (Though soon it was obvious to me that I could defeat him if I worked hard and played 'the publishing game' harder). He held the position of editor-in-chief for three flagship journals in the field and was on the editorial board of every journal that published the most advanced theoretical models. Many considered him a crazy person for handling so many voluntary tasks simultaneously, but he saw it as providing a valuable 'service' to the community. Under his guidance, I learned the secret formula for establishing a solid record in top journals in our field. But there is also more than that.

In the early 2020s, even college admissions were fiercely competitive. To secure a spot at a prestigious university, a robust publication record, preferably in top peer-reviewed journals, was imperative. Desperate parents were willing to pay thousands of dollars to admission counselors for publications to embellish their children's CVs, even if these publications were not peer-reviewed. However, I was incredibly fortunate. My father not only taught me how to excel, but he also ensured my name appeared on the papers he authored. The way how I did for my son (see Sackker & Sackker, 2063, 2065). So, even before starting college, I *scored* around 15 top journal publications. I did not start writing a word, but I already started collecting the coins that were the only currency in the scholarly world.

I continued to excel and progress in cracking the code of publishing throughout my undergraduate years and started my PhD much earlier than the traditional path thanks to the growing number of my publications. It is, after all, a formula – a process to be optimized into a well-oiled machine. It is astonishing to think that the norm used to be publishing only four or five papers during your PhD, which, in my opinion, was a significant inefficiency! During my PhD, I set a university record with ten first-authored articles in six years (Sackker 2025a, 2025b, 2027, 2028a, 2028b, 2028c, 2029, 2030,

2031, 2032) and had another nineteen under review. I don't even recall how many times I was listed as a co-author. Even experts in Neuropsychology, Medicine, and Physics were impressed. This marked the resurgence of our field, the moment when we began to matter again.

This transformation has reshaped how we perceive a PhD in our field today. Now, publishing an article in SJAM is a prerequisite to begin an undergraduate degree. The rule of three published articles earns the right to be supervised for an undergraduate research internship. Graduating with an MSc without a dozen publications is inconceivable. The requirement for an interview for a PhD position is now twenty A* publications. No other academic field demands higher entry requirements than Sackker Studies, thanks to my continuous efforts. Obviously, I set the new norms in the field. At the end of the day, if I had this many papers as a high school student, it shouldn't be this difficult to manage for a PhD student to meet the field's standards.

2. Toward perfect competition

I quickly rose through the ranks, earning my tenure at a relatively early age that many considered improbable. I became known for my constant productivity and success. Other decorations followed suit; I became the department chair, and then the dean of the business school. Upon my 40th year of service, the Board of Trustees decided to rename the University after me. The more brutal tactics I used, the more power I was given. The more power I obtained, the more rewards and accolades followed. And, it was all thanks to publications.

As mentioned, it was not too late when I realized that academia was a ruthless game of publishing, and I was determined to win. I devised smart strategies to dominate the field. I formed alliances with influential professors, manipulated peer review processes, and utilized graduate students, though some may argue I exploited them. But how else could I assist aspiring individuals? Competition, I believed, sharpened the academic landscape, keeping everyone on their toes. Once you decipher the publishing code, it's all about outperforming your rivals. The key was to play the game a little better than your competitors. I then had to use these tactics across all parts of my profession, because the more stellar I became, the more I was selected as a target. Stones and sticks are thrown only at fruit-bearing trees. I was the source of envy, jealousy, and intolerance.

Outcompeting is also important with regard to effective organization of human resources. That starts with recruiting the right ones. To be honest, I never hired the smartest ones but deliberately looked for the ones most eager to get the position. You do not want to deal with those who are willing to criticize you all the time. Intelligence and talent are nice, but persistence and a submissive personality are necessary to earn the right to be supervised. After all, it is endurance, long hours, and focus that pave the way to good science. The best way to optimize productivity is by power and control. Clarity about who is in charge will gain respect and a solid position in the field. Direction toward what should be done, when and how provides the path to success without distractions, detours or dead-end roads.

Once, I had to choose between three postdocs who all had outstanding records. It was difficult, all three candidates were good. I offered all three of them the opportunity to work as an intern for six months. The good thing about the competition is that you can get the best work at the most affordable prices. All these three postdocs were more than happy to get the privilege to work with me for free. The best one would be chosen for the job. The result? I became co-author of fifteen published articles (thirty-three under review), two major research grants, and five scholarships for funded PhD positions. The best one got hired for the job, competing again after one year for a tenure-track position. Needless to say, the competition at this level is even more harsh, but those who work hard would surely deserve their spots.

A pivotal move in my strategy was breaking free from academic narrow-mindedness. Back in the early days of my career, researchers had picked their own topics for investigation, and they stuck to them, and would rarely spillover to other topics. For example, if your work is around aging workers, you just needed to focus on that. If you are a qualitative researcher, then you would dedicate your

entire life to qualitative research. If you deal with work motivation, that would be your geek. But, I managed to break this bigotry. Why are we playing this territorial behavior game? You would never know where the next publication opportunity lies. Why not to publish about everything when the right time comes, but make sure that you use the right methodology? And, how can one think of any other methodology beyond the quantitative one anyway?

I witnessed this with my own eyes. My father always suggested sticking to one methodology, and it should be quantitative only. Proven by my father's success, I regarded only quantitative research methodologies as the gold standard of academia. I dismissed other types of research epistemologies as irrelevant and unworthy of attention. My rigid adherence to a limited set of research approaches limited my ability to understand and contribute to the diverse perspectives and insights offered by other methodologies but confirmed my belief that other types of research epistemologies are inferior and unworthy of consideration in our field. So, I highly benefited from ignoring other types of research epistemologies, such as qualitative, mixed-methods, and critical research, considering them inferior and unimportant.

Besides being a productive researcher, I also did my fair share of work on duties for the field. Since the early years of my undergraduate studies, I have started reviewing manuscripts for established journals, and I made sure that I was a trusted contact for all editors of top journals. I guess my name helped me a bit in this. I was always told that networking was a key factor for success, and now I understand better. I feel it is only fair that in return for my contribution to the field, I also have the right to shape the field to my benefit. I dedicated a special emphasis to rejecting all the papers that had no relevance to my publications. I corrected those that were closely aligned with my area but who neglected to cite my research. Even though many considered this somewhat a dubious practice, it was necessary for my career progress, because many others were doing that. And, it was also somewhat obvious that I was receiving some special treatment by editors, because they knew me in person, thanks to my father's reputation. Of course, I climbed the ladder in this editorial journey quite soon too. Initially, I was maybe a bit hesitant, but since the competition for publishing at top journals was growing, I made sure that I was listed as a co-author in papers submitted to my journal. It was self-evident, really, as I contributed substantially as a reviewer and editor to their work. Authors soon realized this collaborative way of working was the only way to get accepted. This did not happen overnight, but slowly and slowly, I made sure that publishing in the journal one was editing could no longer be considered malpractice. There were already some editors doing that, so why should I be blamed? Wasn't I eventually contributing to the growth of my journal, my department, and eventually, my school? Didn't this help my university to rise in rankings so that we could attract more and more students and secure more funding? Wasn't this a win-win for all stakeholders willing to collaborate with me and support my research?

Inspirational quote 823 (Sackker 2068):

'When they first called me an authority in the field I could not believe it. But I realized that I am. I have changed the field for the better, helped organizations optimize their efficiency. I am responsible for global progress. I am now a "guru"!'

3. The cradle of the SIMPLE field

It is hard to realize now, but not everyone directly recognized the potential of SIMPLE, its elegance and effectiveness. It was a very different time back then. Back in the '20s, people were arguing that we needed a larger diversity of models, epistemologies, and critical thinking. One only has to look at the history of the field to recognize that critical perspectives and diversity of ideas are inefficient at best, and destructive at worst. Critical thinking is a threat to efficiency, competition, and performance. If we all start criticizing each others' work, then we would move into all kinds of different directions, and we would not build toward one unified way of explaining human behavior. What drives

human behavior is the same for us all, we have long understood this is stable and coherent across contexts. Besides, critical thinking is not only a distraction from what really matters; it is also misleading to let people believe they could and should be thinking by and for themselves. The madness to expect this from people, from students, and from academic staff. It would be the same as asking cows to be unicorns or expecting stars to stop shining; both are impossible and fantastical notions. Plurality in ideas is a menace to society, yet it long plagued the masses.

Meaningless diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives peaked in the 20s. Many journals, scientific societies, and institutions across the globe were trying to finetune their policies to ensure fairness and reduce biases. I saw these discussions as mere distractions from my goal of productivity. In a system that rewarded competition, I knew that diversity was not a solution. So, while others preached about social justice, I focused on advancing my own agenda. Fortunately, not many editors of top journals bought this idea either. They knew the danger of inviting unknown authors or those from unknown, less recognized institutions or exotic countries into their journals. Who wants to read about uninteresting problems from uninteresting places? There was a game to play for them too. Citation metrics were all that mattered, and commercial publication would eventually determine the winners of the competition. If they did not allow me to publish, editors knew that they were shooting themselves in the foot. They would lose citations, they would lose profits, they would lose readers. Even on rare occasions at the beginning of my career, it wasn't a big deal to get a second opinion when I got rejected, as all commercial publishers were dependent on my publications. Publishers could contact editors to kindly remind them of the rules of the game.

Over and over, I have seen the devastating effects of asking people to think critically. Critical thinking can reduce your productivity. Critical thinking can cost you a job. Isn't engaging in this type of research a career suicide? Why does one bother to become a critic when there are so many negative consequences? What happens eventually is that after a long and frustrating journey, everyone finds out that we are getting to the same point. Knowing that no one else could match my brilliance, I did what I should for the sake of the advancement of the field: I authored, edited, and reviewed my own works. In the past, we all ended up developing another copy of the same model that others had concluded long before. Or worse, we ended up breaking down perfectly useful theories. What follows from this realization is disappointment, self-doubt, and shame. It is not part of a sustainable path of development for students to demand critical thinking, nor is it in any way helpful for science. It should obviously not be expected from anyone, as it is unattainable. Only the very, very few can do it, and it requires a special talent. It comes with a very long and extensive training, mentoring, and in this process, I have learned to recognize it quickly.

Inspirational quote 1069 (Sackker 2068):

'Critical thinking is only for the very, very few ... and ... even those who can think critically should seek to optimize theory that has proven impact.'

4. The dynasty

Some blame me that I thrived on a culture of cronyism and nepotism, using my connections and favors to further my own agenda. It is not completely true that I used my influence merely to secure publishing opportunities, grants, and promotions for my friends and allies. This was for the advancement of scientific progress. If some blame me for building my career on the backs of exploited scholars, students, and early career researchers and that I preyed on their vulnerabilities, using my position of power to extract their labor and ideas for my own benefit, they should not underestimate the contributions made by our family.

I only helped my dad when my dad was helping me. How can't I ignore the collaboration opportunities provided by my father's network? Those were the most influential, most productive individuals in our field. It just felt that the empire I took over from my dad was growing. It was such a big

one, where my word was law. I controlled funding, research opportunities, and tenure decisions. I became the most excellent, the supreme ruler of our field, and my influence extended far beyond academia. My hard work should have had a payback. It may be true that it is now indistinguishable what my father wrote versus what I contributed as we share the same name, but how could this be my fault?

It was a tough battle. When I first started my career, many critical scholars were raising concerns about the meaninglessness of publications. Some were trying to convince others into slow academia and conveying the message that academia is heading in the wrong direction, but time proved that they were wrong. At the same time, there were plenty of ‘backbenchers’ who never published in top journals or took any editorial roles at prestigious outlets, but who were whining because their fantasies about meritocratic, ethical, fair, and inclusive academia overshadowed their admiration for me. They were merely showcasing their failure and listing their excuses for why they could not fit in the competitive nature of academia. I am the winner! I am the fittest! In games, there should be a winner and losers. Haters gonna hate, losers gonna lose. But, I will always be remembered as the winner!

*Inspirational quote 3591 (Sackker 2068):
‘The best comes from winning and the winner takes it all’*

5. The annual conference announcement

It is also with immense pleasure to announce that the next annual conference of Sackker Studies will take place on May, 14th, 2074. The conference we organized five years ago was rather lonely, but still, I had the pleasure of seeing my beloved colleague who remained active in the field. This was the last time we saw each other. Since we lost him, there have been no participants in the annual conferences. This year is the same. No one has attended. Not even one single submission. There are no longer any researchers left in the field, but I expect next year’s event to be different. You are cordially invited to join this festive event where I deliver 24 consecutive presentations in 8 hours. I will also deliver and receive the Sackker Long-Term Career Success Award and 55-Year Service Award on this occasion. There are also several best paper awards, best editor, and reviewer awards, but these are rather symbolic gestures to honor my service. I am aware that not many researchers are interested in Sackker Studies anymore, but please feel free to get connected and learn the tips on how to be successful.

6. Honest thoughts and regrets

Yet, my journey is not without regrets and dreams. Though I inherited an empire, I wished my son, Dean Richard Sackker III, would follow in my footsteps, continuing our family tradition. The way I learned from my dad, I prepared him for an excellent career in Sackker Studies (e.g., Sackker & Sackker, 2063, 2065), but he never visualized himself as an academic. If I have to offer my regrets throughout my career, my son’s disinterest in academic careers would be the one to cite. Who then could take the relay in this race after me? Especially when there is no one to compete, why would he give up to enjoy the utmost academic freedom? He would have all the crafts and tools to defend our theories, build new arguments, and advance the world’s progress. Who would not want to do that?

On another note, I now realize that my legacy will be tarnished, and my reputation will be forever stained when there is no one after me. There is a potential danger that I will have become a cautionary tale of academic hubris, and all my contributions will be subject to neglect. I recognized that I demanded unwavering loyalty and dedication from my students and collaborators, draining them of their time, energy, and creativity. My hunger for control and recognition left them exhausted and depleted, but I did not see them as mere pawns in my quest for academic domination. Simply, they were not strong enough to fit. Or maybe, I

should be more gentle. As a long-time visionary leader, I shared my thoughts in one of my latest publications (Sackker, [Forthcoming](#)), which proffers insights on why we should consider slow science as an alternative career strategy and presents recommendations to young researchers who are interested in theory development in Sackker Studies. I had no room for ideas that could challenge my own fame and prestige. I dismissed any bright ideas that did not align with my own agenda, fearing they might steal the spotlight from me. My ego was too big to tolerate competition, and I saw myself as the ultimate authority in my field. As I reached the pinnacle of my academic success, I failed to realize that my pursuit of personal gain had dire consequences. The next generation of scholars can also address these issues, as highlighted in the latest study (Sackker, [Forthcoming](#)).

And, finally, some personal anecdotes here: Even though my grandfather carefully named my dad as Dean Richard (initials denoting Dr.), our names came with unfortunate reality. I was known as ‘Dick’ behind my back, a nickname that reflected both my first name and my demeanor as a professor. At first, this may sound innocent. Dick is a common nickname for Richard. Despite my ruthless reputation, I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of satisfaction when I heard students whispering ‘Dick’ as I walked by. It was a reminder that my dominance in the academic field had not gone unnoticed, even if it came at the cost of being perceived as an awful, soul-sucking, and toxic professor. It was no secret that I was known for being tough. I had earned that nickname, and I wore it as a badge of honor, a symbol of my notoriety in academic circles. ‘Dick’ was the name they used behind closed doors, and I knew it all too well. But I didn’t care. In my pursuit of dominance, I had become the very embodiment of my nickname. I am destined to be remembered as Professor Dick Sackker, a joy my son could never get. To conclude:

We are the future of management and organizational research,
Because, at the end of the day
Performance is all that matters
Don’t be fooled by anyone saying that
Our field losing its relevance

It is a deep-rooted understanding that
Cutthroat competition brings out the best in us
And, we should not pretend that
We need to be more inclusive, pluralistic, and diverse

It is obvious that
We need only one methodology
We must refuse to believe that
Accepting other ways of doing research is necessary

For building a sustainable future for our field, clearly
The game is fair and ultimately merit-based
It is a fantasy that
The powerful position of some controls the entry to the field

Without a doubt it is the case that
Competition is healthy and just selects the strong from the weak
And, no one should accept as true that
A burnout pandemic brings the field to a crisis

Is this the future of our field?

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Purpose and personal reflections: a dystopian story that should remain fictional

Purpose of this paper

We embarked on this piece discerning a disturbing statistical trend: the escalating disparities in authorship and citations. While our intuition hinted at this issue, we examined six decades of publications in Management and Organizational Studies to confirm our suspicions. Our research revealed a disconcerting rise in the dominance of elite scholars, as evidenced by increasing Gini coefficients in both authorship and citation inequalities. The Gini coefficient, typically used in macroeconomics to assess income inequality, ranges from zero (indicating perfect equality where all agents share equal outcomes) to one (indicating perfect inequality). Our research (Orhan, van Rosenberg, and Bal 2023) consistently demonstrates growing inequalities across all subfields of Management and Organizational Studies.

This means that today's most prolific scholars boast a significantly more extensive publication record than the most prolific scholars of previous generations. Simultaneously, an increasing

number of researchers are expected to publish in top journals, even though the available space is arbitrarily limited. Consequently, many individuals abandon their pursuit of a scientific career in academia, while the most prolific scholars continue to flourish.

Despite assertions from top journals regarding the global rise in academic competition, accessibility, and representation, our observations tell a different story. A select group of authors is consolidating their positions by publishing more articles across an ever-increasing number of journals. For others, getting published in high-ranked journals becomes increasingly daunting. We contemplated the absurd notion of a scholar becoming the ultimate ruler, the supreme winner, and the sole active researcher. The paradox lies in the emergence of perfect inequality, where an entire field falls under the control of a single researcher. What would that look like? What would be the result of one ultimate scholar winning the grand prize of field ownership?

Surely, being the sole contributor to a field's publications spells disaster. Theory becomes irrelevant to other agents in society. Without academic discourse, there is only emptiness and meaninglessness. It becomes a matter of form preceding content, where the formula matters more than the substance. In this scenario, we aimed to articulate our shared fear and significant concern about the direction the field may be heading. All signs indicate a gloomy future.

But who is this 'Sackker'? Where does the picture in [Figure 1](#) come from? Who is the man depicted? The person in the picture does not exist in real life, yet he is **not** a random AI-generated image. He is a composite representation, a united identity. He represents *sameness*, an embodied character of dominance. This image was created using a face-morphing algorithm based on the collective appearance of the top 10 most published authors in organizational research, utilizing their public profile images. After identifying the most prolific researchers in the field, we noticed common traits shared by nearly all of them: a senior, white, Western male professor with a touch of gray, balding hair, wearing glasses, and possessing blue/green eyes. Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) via Runway ML, we crafted a prompt based on these shared characteristics. Subsequently, employing another AI platform (FaceApp), we significantly aged the individual to conform to the stereotypical image of a senior, Western, white male professor. While the picture may appear all too familiar, and may resemble an actually existing person, it is included because of this resemblance, and the increasingly blurring distinction between what and who are real, and what is fake. In the age of AI-generated scientific papers, this will increasingly be a question of concern.

And how can we describe Dean Richard (Dick) Sackker as a person? Is he evil? Is he only sucking the soul out of everyone, crushing the inner peace of all researchers who tried to do good things with naïve intentions, or is he more than that? In fact, in our imagination, Sackker is not quite different from others in the field who are trapped in the competitive nature of academia. He is a prime example of the 'heroic workaholic publishing machine,' embodying a negative role model as identified by Harley (2019, 286) and a natural by-product the system has created. What distinguishes him from others is that he owns a combination of superpowers, symbolizing the collective traits of our existing 'flawed' role models who compete for resources, obsess over fame and metrics, and strategically position themselves to stay ahead of the competition to conform the expectations of neoliberal academic identities (Boncori 2022; Sai et al. 2024). His mediocrity and lack of intellectual pursuit made him the fittest survivor that every neoliberal institution wishes to hire, and he is ultimately crowned as the ultimate champion. Not necessarily superior, but undoubtedly the fittest, playing the game according to both explicit and implicit rules. Sackker has become the 'Most Excellent,' acing the excellence frameworks, going beyond, and reaching the ultimate goal of becoming the greatest academic in his field. The irony, however, is that despite indicating superlativeness, the title of the 'Most Excellent' historically pertains to members of minor nobility in some European monarchies, for those who are only powerful in their territories but lack power and impact beyond the closed borders of their territory.

We also wrote this piece with worries that the existing role models in academia hold enormous power in the constituencies. Editors at top journals use the sword of Damocles harshly. To substantiate our concerns, one need only look at desk-rejection rates. While editors boast about these rates, the question arises: Are the most productive scholars truly working 50 times harder to publish 50 articles

annually than a Ph.D. student struggling to publish their first paper in the very same journal? It also begs the following question: Why do these elite scholars insist on continuing to publish in academic journals when most of them no longer depend on journal publications, especially given their secure positions in universities? If their motivation is solely based on personal satisfaction or an addiction to the publication system, we must raise more profound questions about the system itself (Bal 2021).

We do not wish to challenge the genuine desire among editors to provide constructive feedback to aspiring authors. However, statistics speak louder than actions and intentions. Inequalities in our scientific fields are burgeoning. Disparities in authorship are inflating, the scientific elite dominates the publication sphere (Bal, van Rossenberg, and Orhan 2024), and citation distributions are spiraling out of control (Nielsen and Andersen 2021). If the current dynamics persist, there is little hope for the future of science in academia.

Moreover, the value of our research in enhancing organizational life and its significance to society is increasingly under scrutiny (Bartunek 2007; Byington and Felps 2017; Hodgkinson 2006). Publications that do not appear in top-tier journals are often disregarded (Aguinis et al. 2020). Shockingly, the pressure to publish gets inconceivable; high school students are now expected to produce scholarly works to get admitted to colleges (Golden and Purohit 2023). Disturbing trends of isomorphism in our research practices (Edwards and Berry 2010) and ontology (Van Rossenberg et al. 2024) have emerged. Additionally, there is an academia-wide burnout crisis (Bal et al. 2019; Levecque et al. 2017). Incentives fail to promote sound scientific practices (Edwards and Roy 2017; Orhan 2020), and instances of misconduct are rarely penalized, even if discovered in time. All these factors foster detrimental practices in academia (Smaldino and McElreath 2016).

We wrote this article to draw attention to these issues within our field, with the aim of fostering inclusivity, equality, diversity, and overall well-being. We urge everyone to contribute and initiate change toward a better future for our field. Our hope is to reverse the processes of elite dominance, gaming, competition, territoriality, and nepotism. Science should advance, and we should challenge archaic practices without waiting for prominent figures to fade away (*cf.* Azoulay, Fons-Rosen, and Zivin 2019).

But is it too late to take action? Is it too late to shake up things, turn them upside down? Together, we can reverse Sackker's poem¹:

Is this the future of our field?
A burnout pandemic brings the field to a crisis
And, no one should accept as true that
Competition is healthy and just selects the strong from the weak

Without a doubt it is the case that
The powerful position of some controls the entry to the field
It is a fantasy that
The game is fair and ultimately merit-based

For building a sustainable future for our field, clearly
Accepting other ways of doing research is necessary
We must refuse to believe that
We need only one methodology

It is obvious that
We need to be more inclusive, pluralistic, and diverse
And, we should not pretend that
Cutthroat competition brings out the best in us

It is a deep-rooted understanding that
Our field losing its relevance
Don't be fooled by anyone saying that
Performance is all that matters

Because, at the end of the day
We are the future of management and organizational research!

What will be the effect of this paper?

Publishing this paper may have consequences. Publishing this paper ‘will’ have consequences. The processes we are fearing in this dystopian story are already embedded in our field. The academic elite in our field is strong and powerful. This paper can be seen as an attack on this elite. This means we may experience difficulty getting papers accepted, being less likely to be asked for editorial positions, less likely to be voted on the board of our professional associations. We may be less likely to get funded, less likely to get promoted, less likely to be hired. We are not naïve, we know how it works, we study how it works.

Fear

In the process of writing this article, we have been in doubt about going ahead with writing and submitting it. We all had moments when we felt scared of losing everything we have worked for. It is uncertain what this paper may set in motion. Will it be read? Or perhaps only by a few and it does not even reach the audience we are looking for?

Or will it be picked up widely and draw a lot of attention? Then the impact may be large, and it may make the change we are aiming for. But also the consequences for us as an author team may be extensive. We read about how fear is part of the elite domination in academia (Beyer and Schmitz 2023), we theorize the processes of exclusion, but experiencing fear in the process of writing is a whole new level. What shall we do? There are so many who have lost their job because of an article, because of speaking up. #Amlnext?

No personal feuds

Whatever effect publishing this paper may have, the worst outcome we can foresee if this becomes personal. If the members of the academic elite in management and organizational theory take it out on us personally, reducing the structural issues to a personal vendetta. This would not help, actually, it would strengthen the power of the academic elite, recognizing and establishing their power. Also, it would show our weakness against this elite, because who are we?

To reduce this chance, we have made a great effort to avoid any personal connotations in our story. If someone recognized themselves in this story, this may be because we have been integrating generic trends and strategies we have observed in our field. It is, in no way, our intention to identify or point at any individual. This is not about one particular person. This story is not written out of personal motives to bring people down. This is not about blaming, naming, and shaming. This is not even about those people who happen to be part of the academic elite of the Management and Organizational Theory field at this moment in time. Also, this is not about us. Depending on some standards, we could be considered to be part of the academic elite ourselves. This is about the future of our academic field. This is the absurdity that has been intensifying over the past few decades. And we just hope it will be nothing like the dystopian story above. And we need everyone, particularly those who are currently members of the academic elite, to change the field. We should also challenge the idea that we not need big, fancy outlets to communicate our findings while making ourselves dependent on the system that has been criticized heavily. We really hope to convey these messages.

For whom should we publish this paper?

So, given the potential risks associated with publishing this paper, and the possibility of it being used to fuel personal disputes, why should we submit it? Or, perhaps more importantly, to whom do we owe the publication of this paper?

Our fear does not stem from the potential backlash we might face. Instead, it is rooted in the deteriorating state of academic life and its inability to ensure meaningful careers in the face of hypercompetitive conditions. The consequences are profound: we have lost exceptionally talented individuals with innovative ideas to the extremes of competition and exclusion. We have lost them due to stress and burnout. Some have left because they deemed it unworthy. Others departed feeling they could not contribute to something meaningful. Additionally, we have witnessed the loss of numerous intriguing ideas that never garnered attention due to not being flashy enough for top-tier journals.

Similarly, we find ourselves reading countless irrelevant studies. Many researchers are forced to postpone their genuine interests in pursuit of navigating their careers. However, these ideas are lost because most outlets that matter for careers do not facilitate meaningful discussions. We have lost many individuals who realized the hollowness of academic careers. We are losing them now. When pondered deeply, it becomes apparent that we lost some of them long ago; they never had the chance to publish anything, commence a PhD, or even pursue a university degree.

We are writing this paper for those who lack an academic voice or have never had the opportunity to develop one. We are writing for the future of the field because many others cannot. This endeavor represents a collective effort to seek and offer care, a collective call for change.

And it is not just within our field; we are eager to address some of the pressing issues affecting our day-to-day academic environment. If you doubt our concerns, you can refer to the interview with Peter Higgs, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2013. In the interview, he expressed his worries about being perceived as unproductive in the current system (Aitkenhead 2013). Additionally, you can read the interview with Katalin Karikó, the 2023 Nobel Prize laureate, where she mentioned, ‘Ten years ago, I was forced to retire’ (The Nobel Prize 2023a). She also shared her experience of being bullied due to lack of funding (The Nobel Prize 2023b) and revealed how her groundbreaking research was rejected by a top journal for being considered merely incremental (Nair 2021). All of these instances indicate a pressing need for substantial change. And, we can start in our own field.

More honest personal reflections and self-critique

First and foremost, we are writing this article because our profession demands it. As scholarly researchers, our careers depend on (the number of) publications we produce. Within our institutions, we are evaluated primarily by the prestige of our publication venues rather than the genuine contributions we make. Unfortunately, this often leads to the *inevitable* pollution of research space and the clogging of the publication system. In many prominent journals, rejection rates are on the rise, while many colleagues worldwide struggle to secure permanent positions, advance their careers, or obtain financial means. The global competition in academia leads to an abundance of (similar, repetitive, and uninteresting) papers published across numerous journals, leaving little room for creativity in scholarly communication (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2024). Many researchers, *ourselves included*, feel the need (as well as the dilemma) to produce such papers simply to fulfill the requirements and expectations for academic advancement. However, we are deeply concerned about the current system, dictated by the dominant scientific elite, and the proliferation of academic malpractices resulting from exploitation, salami slicing, self-plagiarism, and unethical research conduct – and many other questionable research practices that artificially inflate the publication record of the elite. At the same time, we are troubled by the meaninglessness of the constant pressure fueled by the competitive, neoliberal universities (Boncori 2022; Fleming 2021; Wang et al. 2023) and the inhumane conditions created by it (Korica 2022). We write this paper because we would like to emphasize that scientific progress relies on teamwork rather than on individuals with egotistical, superstar personas like Ibrahimović, Ronaldo, or Messi, as we fictionally illustrated that the consequences might be too *messy*. Therefore, instead of simply posting this piece online, we are keen to publish it in a journal that will reach the appropriate audience and have a meaningful impact. Nevertheless, we also recognize that impact can be achieved

through means beyond traditional publications. Still, we hope this piece will be read, and it will disturb some – *the more, the merrier!*

As authors of this paper, we self-identify as one senior and two mid-career scholars who have each encountered the challenges of navigating the academic career process. Holding positions as journal authors, editors, and PhD supervisors, we currently enjoy a certain degree of privilege, as well as freedom, within academia. However, we believe this status also entails a responsibility to advocate for positive change. Through our ongoing research projects, we, the authors, are deliberately trying to make changes to academia, and this piece is the culmination of a larger set of studies (including quantitative, qualitative, and conceptual work) in which we problematize the workings of the current academic system. We integrate discussions and concerns like those addressed in this paper into our mentorship of new generations of researchers and participate in activist networks, aiming to foster a more respectful and supportive academic environment. While acknowledging the importance of established practices such as publishing in respected journals for career advancement and recognition (Alvesson and Spicer 2016), we advocate for collaboration with new generations of researchers to reform the system from within and shape future practices. We recognize the value of collaboration, teamwork, and promoting an ethical and dignified research environment. Finally, it is important to clarify that we do not write this piece solely to challenge and disturb the scientific elite, as there is a risk that our work may be disregarded. Rather, we write with the intention of offering hope to the new generation of scholars and ensuring that our insights resonate with them. By explicitly addressing these issues, we aim to prompt meaningful discussions and pave the way for positive change. We believe that it is our duty to use our privileges to strive for a more dignified and humane academia.

Theoretical discussions

In alignment with the genre of our paper, which falls under ‘Writing Differently,’ we acknowledge recent calls for liberating and creative methods of conveying research ideas, as advocated by Boncori (2022), Gilmore et al. (2019), and Kostera (2022) and we join this debate with our dystopian piece. The increasing frequency of such calls suggests a growing demand for unconventional modes of communicating research ideas that surpass traditional norms. As bizarre as our story may seem, we reflect theoretical trends in Sackker’s narrative. In the following section, we provide theoretical directions, explore the factors that drive the hypercompetitive nature of academia, and discuss how the scientific elite maintains status quo, leading to perpetual inequalities.

Territoriality and territorial behavior

Usually, elite scholars gain their eminence through hyperspecialization, or through focusing on one topic or concept and publishing on this topic over and over again (Bal 2021). This hyperspecialization can be explained by territorial behavior, seeking to demarcate, establish, and defend one’s position in the field. Scholars often build their careers over time until the point where they are associated with a particular topic. The concept of territoriality and territorial behavior (by humans) has been brought into the realm of the organizational and work context (Brown 2009; Brown, Lawrence, and Robinson 2005). Territories represent valued spaces in which people make proprietary claims with the aim of gaining influence and strategic advantage. We see similarities in how space in academia, in terms of topics and subfields, can be viewed as an arena of territorial behavior. Brown (2009) identifies four types of territorial behavior, which we can also identify in the behavior of academics. Firstly, *identity-oriented marking*, or personalization, refers to the deliberate decoration or modification to reflect the owner’s identity. We find this in the academic world by the demarcation of academic contributions being grounded in the name of the academic. Not only do we refer to each others’ work by the last name of the author (*The key work* by Brown, Lawrence, and Robinson 2005), but the name is synonymous with the academic status in the field. Names are lent to models, concepts, and measurement

scales indicating the demarcation of the field. The 'big-names-in the field' are recognized as such, and early-career scholars are made aware of those big names in their respective areas.

Secondly, *control-oriented marking* involves marking a space with symbols that communicate the boundaries of a territory, and who has psychological ownership. We see control-oriented marking in the form of studies claiming the state-of-the-art of the field, identifying 'key contributions,' establishing and strengthening conceptual, theoretical, and methodological norms. Another way is to introduce a reconceptualization of an existing concept or a new theory or framework. The development of a measurement scale is very powerful in this respect. By developing, validating, and advertising a new measure, over time, a field is claimed by establishing the measurement scale as 'the only right way to measure this particular concept.' The field can be controlled by rejecting studies that have not used a particular measurement scale. Underlying the examples of control-oriented marking is positioning in the editorial system. By reviewing and sitting on editorial boards. As such, authors control what gets accepted, and what gets rejected, which is fundamental to further establishing their position in the field.

Thirdly, *anticipatory-defending* is based on preventing others from successfully taking or using the territory. This takes place in more subtle forms by organizing conferences targeting a topic or subfield, editing a special issue, or chairing a division at a major conference. In this way, academics guard their position in the field, showcasing their work and expressing their normative views. In this way, critique can be discouraged at the stage of early development. In this way, it is signaled to early career academics that a field is 'taken' and that there is no place unless you comply with existing theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks established by the top scholar in the field. Early career scholars are unaware that it may be an anticipatory-defending mechanism if a more senior scholar points out: 'That is just not where I see the field is going.'

Fourthly, *reactionary-defending* includes the actions that are taken after, and in reaction to, an infringement of the territory. We find examples of such territorial fights in the establishment of conceptual approaches; some take place in the public domain in academic articles, particularly in the essay and response type of articles. There are examples of typical fights between conceptual or theoretical schools of thought, resulting in the territories in the field becoming clearly demarcated to early career scholars. Already in the early phases of their careers, it is important to choose between 'who to follow' and 'to which tribe to aspire to belong.' In line with territoriality theory, such fights over territory may actually reduce conflict over time by further establishing the positions in the field, and further clarifying the boundaries of ownership.

Nepotism and cronyism

Academic connections and networks can operate with both positive and negative intentions (Macfarlane 2021). Nepotism, defined as the granting of favors or opportunities based on relationships rather than merit, has been a longstanding issue in the academic world (De la Croix and Goñi 2021). While nepotism can be found in various organizational settings, its implications in academia take a unique turn due to the significance of name recognition and identity-marking behaviors.

In academic contexts, symbiotic relationships often develop, particularly when there are hierarchical disparities. For instance, graduate students might offer gift authorship to senior academics to acknowledge their supervision and guidance, demonstrating the support they have received. Alternatively, students might feel compelled to include their supervisors as co-authors to avoid coercive tactics, even if their contributions are minimal. Conversely, supervisors might add graduate students as co-authors to boost their careers. These practices blur the lines of true contributions, making it challenging to discern individual scholarly input.

Gaming, competition, and bullying

Certainly, the academic landscape is rife with metaphors, one of the most prevalent being the notion of 'learning to play the game.' This phrase, while commonly used in guiding early-career researchers,

has been criticized by scholars such as Butler and Spoelstra (2020) for its inherent problematic nature. Despite these criticisms, numerous resources, like the work of Fisher and James (2022), continue to employ this metaphor in advising aspiring academics on how to navigate the complexities of an academic career. This trend underscores a fundamental truth: people in academia, like in any field, respond to incentives. The quest to decipher the coding of hyperproductivity, driven by the pressure to publish prolifically, has become a central focus for many researchers. However, this hyperfocus on productivity has given rise to a significant issue – scholarly contributions are often evaluated solely based on the quantity of publications in prestigious journals. Paradoxically, these top-tier journals, once considered the essence of academic excellence, are now becoming increasingly inaccessible and competitive. This phenomenon reflects Goodhart's law, where a measure, when transformed into a target, ceases to be an effective measure. As a consequence, academia is slowly transforming into a numbers game, where the emphasis on quantity overshadows the quality and depth of research output (Biagioli and Lippman 2020). Thus, for many, it is no longer surprising to discover that high-profile scholars engage in scientific misconduct, fraudulent studies, and unethical practices.

In this competitive environment, another aspect comes to light – the role of power dynamics and unethical behavior in academic success. Täuber and Mahmoudi (2022) argue that some academics rise to star status not in spite of but because of their bullying behavior. This assertion sheds light on a darker facet of academia, where individuals might exploit their positions of power and influence to advance their careers. Such behavior not only undermines the ethical principles that should guide scholarly pursuits but also perpetuates a toxic academic culture where intimidation and manipulation thrive. As the pressure to succeed intensifies, addressing these power imbalances and ethical concerns becomes crucial for maintaining the integrity of academic careers. Balancing the need for productivity with fostering a nurturing and respectful academic environment is a challenge that the scholarly community must confront, acknowledging that the current metrics and power structures might be fundamentally flawed, requiring a reevaluation of how success and impact are measured and achieved in academia.

Elite dominance

As Merton (1968) stated, distinguished scientists receive excessive recognition for their contributions, whereas lesser-known scientists often receive inadequate credit for comparable work. Consequently, established researchers tend to be more productive in the long term, leading to increased citations and resources. This cycle perpetuates their prominence (Bosquet and Combes 2013; Nielsen and Andersen 2021). The existing disparity in academia has significant implications for individuals, teams, institutions, and scientific progress, as only a small fraction of academics benefit from the current publishing system. As a result, inequalities inevitably perpetuate over time.

The overrepresentation also has further consequences. As the scientific elite gain their eminence through gatekeeping roles, they may, either directly or indirectly, impose a certain level of control over ontological, methodological, and epistemological approaches in research, overstating the generalizability of findings from certain contexts while marginalizing the research from and about underrepresented backgrounds (Bal and Dóci 2018; Lewis 2022).

Reproduction of form and meaninglessness of academic career competitiveness

The concept of Reproduction of Form, coined by Yurchak (2003), was indicative of representing the governing principle in post-Stalin Soviet Union. After Stalin's era, subsequent governments adhered to the established discourse, maintaining it until the collapse of the Soviet Union over four decades later. In this context, official discourse gradually diverged from reality, forcing citizens to read between the lines and adopt a pragmatic approach to understand the true meaning behind public speech.

Similarly, a parallel can be drawn in contemporary academic management research, where a rigid formula dictates acceptability (Bal, van Rossenberg, and Orhan 2024). Academic research conforms

to specific patterns, determined by elites who dictate the types of research accepted in top-tier journals, often favoring positivistic quantitative methodologies. Even the structure and style of journal papers are tightly prescribed and must be replicated to gain acceptance within the academic community. Thus, form dictates the content, design, and scope of acceptable study norms published in peer-reviewed outlets. Consequently, the potential for groundbreaking, unconventional, or interdisciplinary research is stifled. The true essence of scholarly exploration, the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of exploring, is overshadowed by the need to conform to these predetermined, dictated forms and norms. In this neoliberal academic model, a new set of assumptions and norms prevails, leading to the gradual erosion of scholarly ideals. What were once regarded as unethical practices have transformed into widely accepted norms for many academics, driven by hypercompetitive conditions (Macfarlane 2021).

Conclusion

In this article, we presented a fictional narrative centered around Professor Dean Richard Sackker, a highly accomplished management and organizational scholar, who is now the sole researcher in the field known as Sackker Studies. Despite its absurdity, Sackker has not only developed the most advanced meta-theoretical models, broken publication and citation records, and conquered the field but has also effectively stifled competition, leaving no challengers in his wake. He indebted his fame with his meta-theories over time by being the only gatekeeper in the established journals. He has done so by crushing the soul of younger researchers and early career academics, rejecting any contribution beyond his theories, and burning out and scaring away any potential competition. The paradox lies in the emergence of perfect inequality, where the entire field falls under the control of a single researcher, whose work becomes irrelevant to other agents in society, leading to isolation and alienating others. As a result, the field has consisted of the memories of an eminent scholar under the illusion of his grandiose persona shaped by the *pseudologia fantastica* syndrome.

This story explores his personal reflections, offering insights into his stellar career, his use of bullying as a career strategy, the secret behind his brilliance, and the transformation of the entire field under his reign. In exploring this narrative, we examine its absurdity while also considering its proximity to reality in today's academia. Drawing upon personal experiences, we lament the growing inequalities and the dominance of elite scholars despite widespread efforts to address these issues. The theoretical discussion highlights the issues around the increasing sense of meaninglessness in academic careers, the prevalence of gaming in publications, and the systemic problems plaguing academia and scholarly careers. In conclusion, we aim to inspire hope for the next generation of academic researchers. By shedding light on these systemic issues and integrating them into the core of our scholarly discussions, there is a growing opportunity to initiate change and empower future scholars.

Note

1. We were inspired by political advertisement, Lopez Murphy for president – Truth, created by Savaglio\TBWA, Buenos Aires which were awarded with the silver lion in the Cannes Lions Contest 2006.

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