ARCH G. WOODSIDE

Emerald

Bad to Good

Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research

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As the editor of a respectable academic Marketing journal, I identify very closely with the research issues pointed out by Professor Woodside, and also strongly believe that he is moving in the right direction to ameliorate the identified problems. Woodside is a hugely experienced researcher and editor, immensely respected in the management and marketing world. His insights and wisdom are ignored at a researcher's peril – there is a strong wind of change blowing through business research, and this book offers a clear guide to help weather the storm by conducting genuinely useful research.

– Professor Roger Marshall, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

A highly practical and readable book on bad practices in research and how to fix them. I particularly appreciated the focus on the following: mismatch between theory and research; non-response bias; and single outcome dependent variable. *Bad to Good* is a must read for scholars of any age and especially for doctoral students.

– Jagdish N. Sheth, Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Marketing, Emory University, USA

The book is a 'must read' for all business researchers who want to stay on top of recent developments in quantitative research methods. Based on complexity theory tenets, the book illustrates the flaws of mainstream use of regression analysis and structural equation modeling in the development of useful theories. Examples from various fields impressively demonstrate the increase in quality of research findings coming with the use of configurational analysis.

– Dr. Hans Mühlbacher, Professor of Marketing, International University of Monaco

This is a landmark contribution to the renewal of research methodology. The bulk of research in business and management is still misguided by the positivist paradigm from the 1600s, dominated by surveys and hypothetico-deductive techniques and the claim that such research is 'rigorous'. Unfortunately it is better characterized as 'rigid' and 'ritualistic' and it seldom has relevance for practitioners. Arch Woodside is a brave thinker who advocates a move to a complexity paradigm and that we need cases to do so and to generate theory on a more general and abstract level.

– Evert Gummesson, Emeritus Professor, Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University, Sweden

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Bad to Good is dedicated to my colleagues, the Carroll School of Management, Boston College, and to my wife, friend, and colleague, Carol Murphey Megehee.

Preface

Most of the articles in most of the scholarly journals in finance, management, marketing, and organizational studies include empirical positivistic methods and findings – and each of these empirical articles likely includes 3–10 or more bad practices that this book describes. The introductory chapter includes how to design-in good practices in theory, data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretations to avoid these bad practices. Given that bad practices in research are ingrained in the career training of scholars in sub-disciplines of business/management (e.g., through reading articles exhibiting bad practices usually without discussions of the severe weaknesses in these studies and by research courses stressing the use of regression analysis and structural equation modeling), this book is likely to have little impact. However, scholars and executives supporting good practices should not lose hope. The relevant literature includes a few brilliant contributions that can serve as beacons for eliminating the current pervasive bad practices and for performing highly competent research.

CHAPTER

1 Moving away from Bad Practices in Research toward Constructing Useful Theory and Doing Useful Research

Arch G. Woodside

ABSTRACT

The introductory chapter includes how to design-in good practices in theory, data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretations to avoid these bad practices. Given that bad practices in research are ingrained in the career training of scholars in sub-disciplines of business/management (e.g., through reading articles exhibiting bad practices usually without discussions of the severe weaknesses in these studies and by research courses stressing the use of regression analysis and structural equation modeling), this editorial is likely to have little impact. However, scholars and executives supporting good practices should not lose hope. The relevant literature includes a few brilliant contributions that can serve as beacons for eliminating the current pervasive bad practices and for performing highly competent research.

Keywords: Bad; competency; complexity; configuration; good; incompetency

Introduction

Across several decades scholars (Inman, 2012; Lutz, 1991; Mick, 2006; Pham, 2013; Sheth, 1982; Wells, 1993) bemoan the low relevancy/impact of most articles in the leading journals in research in business, management, and marketing – the number of citations in the literature is the stable proxy for both relevancy and impact. Though scholarly, empirical, journal articles do appear that have high impact but low usefulness, and vice versa, most articles high in impact also have high usefulness. In a study of the impact of articles appearing during 2004–2008 in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Pham (2013, p. 412) reports that "very few articles – less than 10% – get very well cited, and the vast majority – roughly 70% – hardly ever get cited [by anyone, ever]. In other words, the vast majority of the research that gets published, even in our top [ranked] journals – perhaps 70% of it – hardly has any measurable scholarly impact in terms of citations." Consequently, Pham (2013, p. 412) describes "seven sins of consumer psychology" as "the roots of our relevancy shortcomings." However, Pham's (2013) proposal of seven sins in journal articles do not get to the roots of the low impact of most articles in ranked journals. The present article reframes, broadens, and deepens the discussion of the lack of relevancy/impact of the *JCR* and most (likely all) journals related to the business sub-disciplines. Rather than low relevancy, the claim here is that the deeper issue is the pervasive use of bad research practices appearing in most articles in most of these journals and all journals related to the sub-disciplines of business/management research.

With the objective of reducing the high volume of bad practices in research, this chapter offers propositions for improving theory construction and empirical testing of theory especially by early to mid-career scholars in the sub-disciplines of business/management. Here is a brief summary of four of these propositions. (1) Most articles appearing in most of the ranked (i.e., A*, A, B, and C rankings in the ABDC, 2013 listings) journals of the business/management sub-disciplines exhibit 3+ bad practices in theory construction and research procedures. (2) The use of bad practices contributes to the low usefulness/relevancy/impact of most of the articles appearing in the leading the journals. (3) The prevalence of bad practices is likely a result of the training focus of doctoral students that is almost exclusively on the use of symmetric tests (e.g., regression analysis including structural equation

models of collecting verbal responses to five- and seven-point scaled questions) and the reading of literature exhibiting a plethora of bad practices. (4) Additional training and planning is possible to avoid the use of bad practices and embrace the use of good practices; early to mid-career scholars should do both: train and plan to adopt readily available but ignored good practices.

This chapter describes 22 bad practices prevalent in the sub-disciplines of business/management; most of bad practices appear pervasively among most articles among the ranked journals. A summary of the 20 bad (and good) practices appears in Table 1. The discussion of each bad practice includes suggestions of steps useful to take to avoid or eliminate such practices. The references in the discussion are particularly useful sources for learning how to avoid bad practices in business/management-related research and how to embrace good practices. The list and discussion of bad practices is incomplete; discussion of research by scholars "breaking bad" in a few studies may help decrease your use of bad practices and increase your use of good research practices. This chapter does not include the accusation that many scholars seek to use bad practices purposively in designing and implementing their studies; the lack of training and the mental stance of asking what is bad and good practices are likely to be principal causes of the current domination of bad practices.

Recipes of antecedents to using bad practices are likely to include combinations of the following features: lack of experience (most scholars submitting most papers are likely to submit twenty or fewer studies based on completing twenty different data files in their lifetimes); lack of training beyond building and testing theories centering on the net effects of independent variables on a single dependent variable; modeling their own research behavior by reading published studies exhibiting several bad practices; and having zero to very limited exposures to the relevant literature on adopting good practices in behavioral/business research (e.g., here are some primary sources that include exceptional insights and advice for designing and implementing good practices in research and data analysis: Armstrong, 2012; Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Eskin & Baron, 1977; Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Gigerenzer & Brighton, 2009; Golder, 2000; Howard & Morgenroth, 1968; Levitt & List, 2007; McClelland, 1998; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Ragin, 2008; Sawyer & Ball, 1981; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Whyte, 1984).