



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

I wish to congratulate the editorial team on their forthright lead article in MOR12.4 regarding the state of empirical research in our field. I strongly endorse the aspiration of making the field more scientific. I understand the need to regain confidence in published empirical social science. But I would not wish readers to come away with the idea that such concerns define the heart of the discipline. The paper was quite properly concerned with bringing empirical research up to the highest standards. But let us not forget that there is another endeavor running in partnership, and in any review, it should not be taken for granted. I refer to theory-building.

Building cumulative knowledge requires constant interflow between the *idiographic* work that gets and presents the data, and the *nomothetic* that does something with it. Theory-building can have much bigger scope and reach and potency. For instance, the Aston studies, with their 114-page interview schedule on organization structure, and their stream of foundational ASQ papers, were one of the many bases for Mintzberg's general theory of organization structure (in spite of what we learned later to be improvable statistical analyses). For that theory to evolve took Henry a great deal of nomothetic pondering, and essaying. In a similar manner, there emerged, for instance, John Child's theory of strategic choice, some of the early cultural difference work, and later still the comparing of business systems. So, despite the foundational nature of the primary empirical craftsmanship, new explanations at the nomothetic level can eventually make important contributions to both theory and practice, and it is these new frameworks that feed back into motivating the empiricists.

A final point is that the higher-level sense-making commonly stretches scholars into multi-disciplinary work, and that needs to be seen as a source of enrichment feeding back into the central discipline.

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