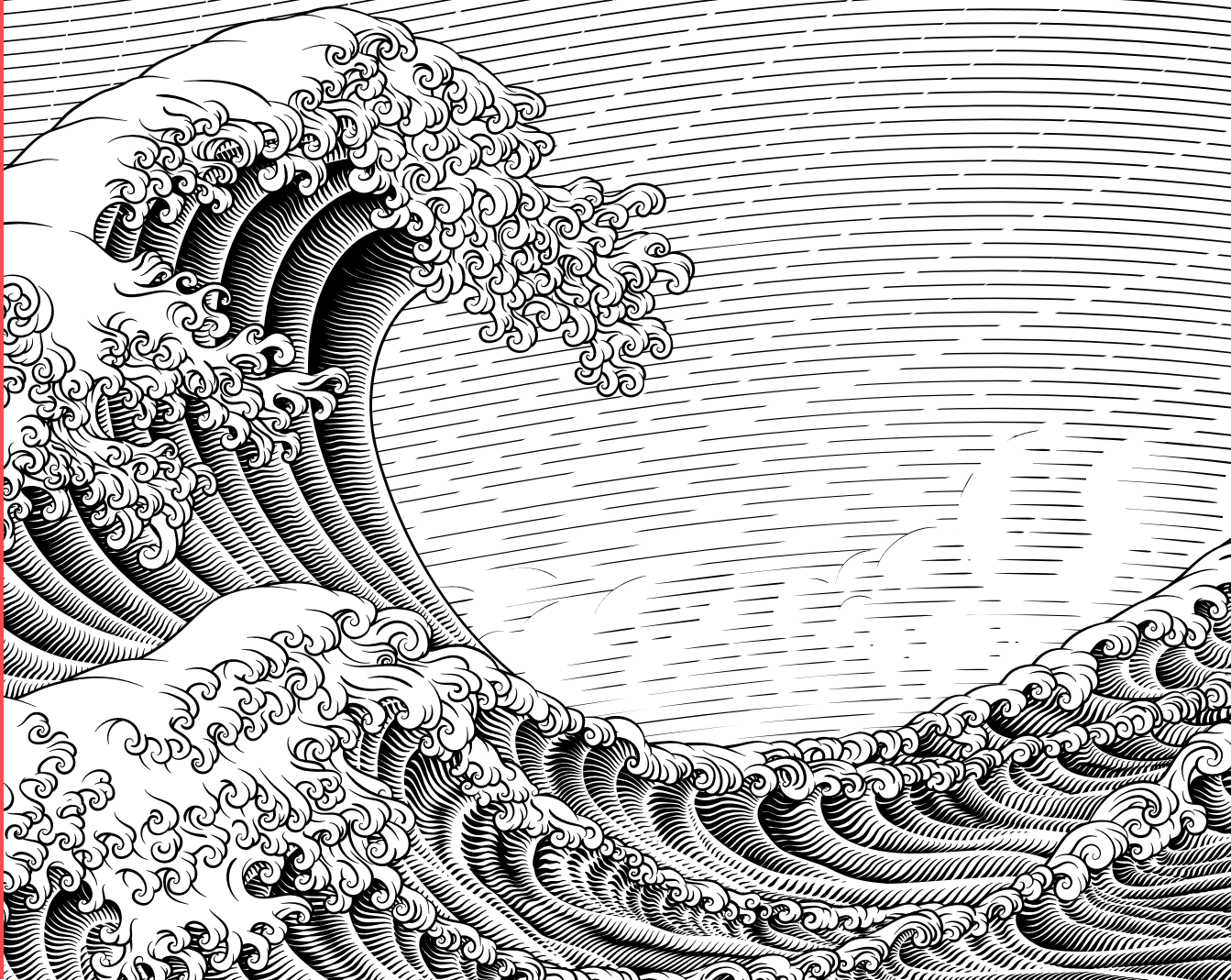


## Helping Business Schools Swim out the Irresponsible Research Perfect Storm



# Helping Business Schools Swim out the Irresponsible Research Perfect Storm

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# 75%

75% of research is not replicable

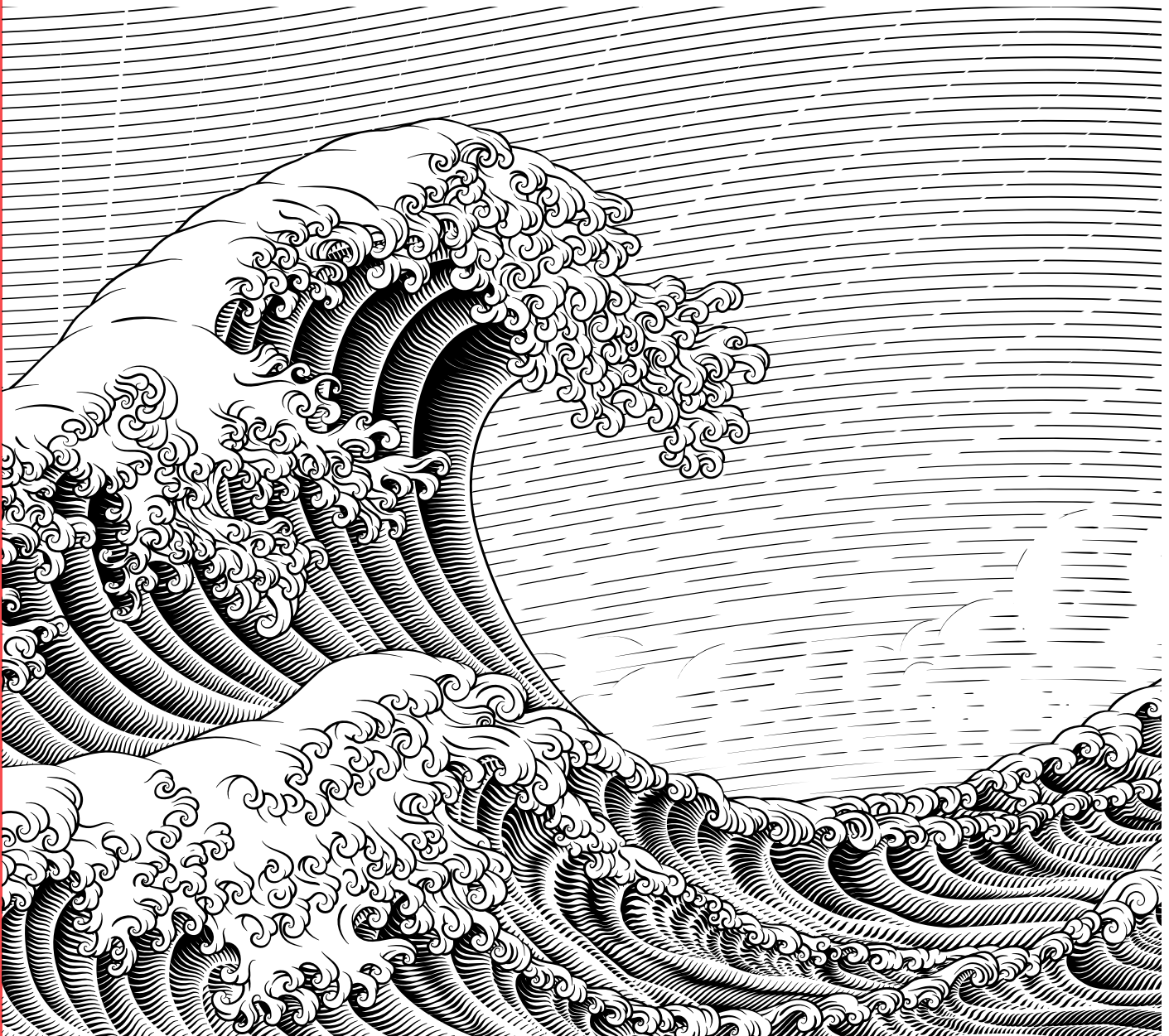
Business schools are currently navigating a 'perfect storm' of challenges related to research practices, says **Herman Aguinis**

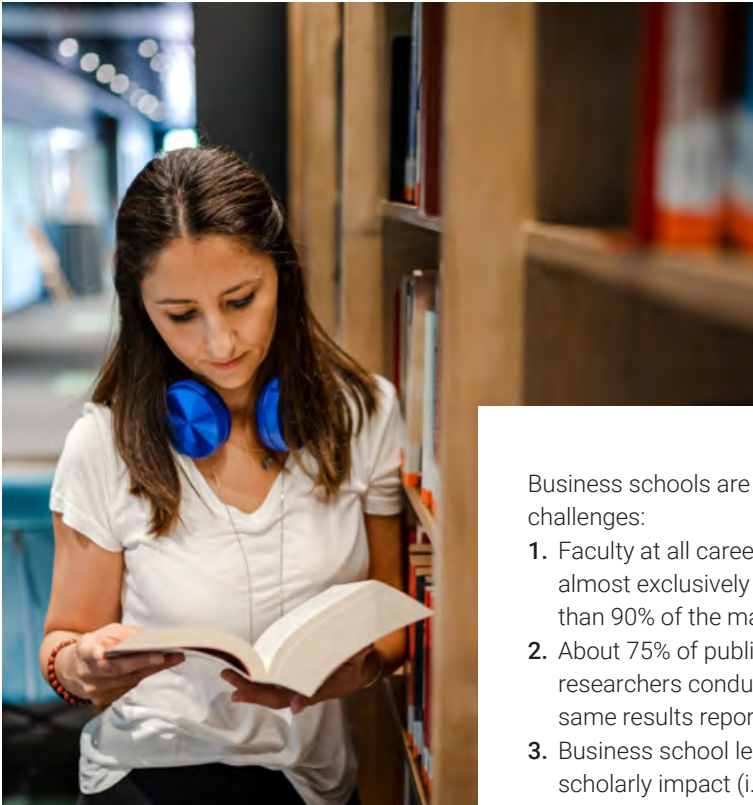
**B**usiness school research practice challenges include the intense pressure faculty members face to publish in top-tier journals with high rejection rates, the concerning fact that about 75% of published research is not replicable, and the ongoing quest for definable and measurable scholarly impact. This confluence of issues can be likened to the perilous journey of the fishing boat Andrea Gail in the movie 'The Perfect Storm', leading to a situation where faculty may resort to questionable practices to secure publication and advancement, often sidelining the true impact of their work. The alarming rise in article retractions highlights the severity of the crisis. In response, the book 'Research Methodology: Best Practices for Rigorous, Credible, and Impactful Research' aims to guide researchers, reviewers, and academic leaders towards adopting high-quality methodological practices, thereby fostering research that is both credible and impactful. This comprehensive resource seeks to elevate the standard of business research, emphasising the importance of methodology, ethical conduct, and the broader impact of scholarly work.



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*...a situation where faculty may resort to questionable practices to secure publication and advancement, often sidelining the true impact of their work*





Business schools are facing at least three critical research-related challenges:

1. Faculty at all career stages face increasing pressure to publish almost exclusively in highly competitive journals that reject more than 90% of the manuscripts they receive
2. About 75% of published research is not replicable (i.e., different researchers conduct the same study but are unable to obtain the same results reported in the original one)
3. Business school leadership continues to look for the 'Holy Grail' of scholarly impact (i.e., everyone wants to have an impact, but impact is not clearly defined, measured, or rewarded)

These three challenges create what we labelled 'the irresponsible research perfect storm' in a *Journal of Management Studies* article (Aguinis, Archibold and Rice, 2022). You probably watched the movie 'The Perfect Storm', in which the fishing boat Andrea Gail is at the heart of an unforgettable saga. The story unfolds as the crew, underwhelmed by their recent catch, return to shore only to face the stark threat of unemployment from the company's owner. This ignites a fiery resolve in Captain Bill Tyne, who vows to safeguard his crew's livelihoods and shatter expectations by hauling an unprecedented catch. Persuading his crew to undertake one final voyage before the winter sets in, they embark on a journey that promises great rewards. Their determination bears fruit as they net a colossal catch, but their triumph is short-lived. The journey home turns perilous when the weather takes a menacing turn, positioning a lethal trap directly in their path. Fueled by the allure of financial gain, the crew braves the storm, unknowingly sailing into the clutches of a catastrophic convergence. A low-pressure system's warm air, a high-pressure system's cool and dry flow, and the tropical moisture from a nearby storm intertwine to spawn the ultimate tempest. Despite their valiant efforts, the Andrea Gail succumbs to the relentless power of the sea, taking with it the lives of six brave souls. Had the crew faced only warm air from a low-pressure system coming from one direction, they may have survived. They may have survived if they had only faced the cool, dry air flow generated by high pressure from another direction. They may have survived if they had only faced tropical moisture from a tropical storm. But, *the combination of these three factors simultaneously led to their demise.*

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# 90%

Faculty at all career stages face increasing pressure to publish almost exclusively in highly competitive journals that reject more than 90% of the manuscripts they receive





Business schools face a similarly dangerous perfect storm based on the above-mentioned challenges. Combined, they result in faculty feeling pressured to tailor their research so it can be published in one of the 'A' journals (Aguinis, Cummings, Ramani and Cummings, 2020). In addition, these simultaneously existing factors result in faculty doing 'whatever it takes' to publish in those journals to avoid being fired and to achieve promotion and other rewards. What is the net outcome? *Nature* reported that more than 10,000 articles were retracted in 2023 (a new record), and [retractionwatch.com](https://retractionwatch.com) provides detailed information on the increased use of questionable research practices leading to retractions across numerous business fields. Of course, impact becomes an afterthought, particularly given that promotion and reward systems do not usually include impact explicitly but mainly focus on 'counting A publications'.

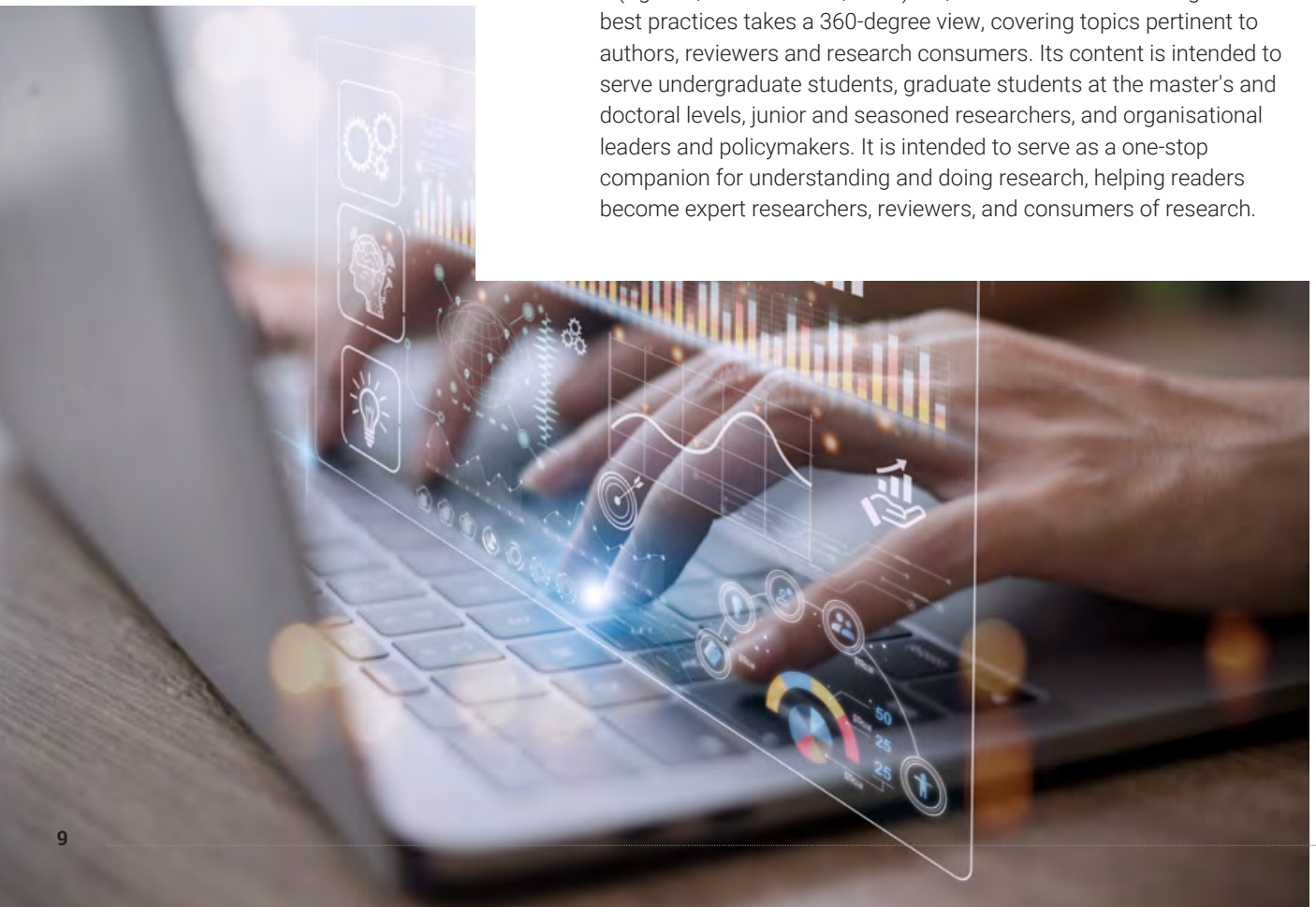
How can business schools avoid drowning and successfully swim out of the irresponsible research perfect storm? How can researchers engage in trustworthy and valuable research? What is the role of journal editors and reviewers? What is the role of university and business school leaders?

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ways of doing things wrong*

To provide some answers to these questions, I wrote a book titled *Research Methodology: Best Practices for Rigorous, Credible, and Impactful Research* (SAGE Publications, 2025). Much like in any other profession—from electrician to doctor—there are ways of doing things right and ways of doing things wrong. In business research, this refers to putting our methodological tools to good use so the resulting research is trustworthy and also valuable for society. If research is done well and with impact in mind, it will likely be published in good journals. So, researchers can learn and implement high-quality methodological practices without engaging in questionable research practices. More importantly, high-quality and relevant research is more likely to be impactful inside and outside academic circles. This book is the product of my 30+ years of experience in research methodology as a researcher and research consumer. It is also the product of my experience as an evaluator of research quality in my capacity as former editor-in-chief of *Organizational Research Methods*, which is devoted entirely to research methodology, as well as having served as an editorial board member for more than 25 journals and as an evaluator for grant proposals in the United States and many other countries around the world (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Israel, Romania, United Arab Emirates).

To swim out of the irresponsible research perfect storm, authors need to learn how to do research well, reviewers and editors need to learn how to evaluate such research, and university leaders need to be able to recognise good research to encourage and reward it (Aguinis, Yu and Tosun, 2021). So, this book on methodological best practices takes a 360-degree view, covering topics pertinent to authors, reviewers and research consumers. Its content is intended to serve undergraduate students, graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels, junior and seasoned researchers, and organisational leaders and policymakers. It is intended to serve as a one-stop companion for understanding and doing research, helping readers become expert researchers, reviewers, and consumers of research.





The first goal of this book is to synthesise this vast body of work on methodological best practices in a user-friendly manner. The reason for this approach is that most business school researchers are not methodological specialists - nor do they want to take on such a role. Instead, most researchers are *methods users* as we conduct our own research and *methods consumers* as we read the research produced by others. In addition, this book presents material and best practices mainly in the form of checklists. In other words, I wrote this book like a tutorial to include 'how-to' and 'dos and don'ts' guidelines so you can understand the extent to which methodological best practices are being followed - and so that readers can follow best practices in your research. Each chapter includes figures and tables to make the material easier to digest. In addition, each chapter (a) describes why the particular methodological topic is essential for doing rigorous, credible, and impactful research; (b) explains and expands upon the summaries, checklists, and steps in the figures and tables; and (c) provides examples and applications to demonstrate that the best-practice recommendations are actionable and implementable and not just wishful thinking.

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*Most researchers are methods users as we conduct our own research and methods consumers as we read the research produced by others*





To swim out of the irresponsible research perfect storm, we also need to expand our framework for defining the craft of doing research. So, the book covers the entire research process from the beginning (i.e., how to generate and test good theory) through to the end (i.e., how to report results openly and transparently). In addition, it includes chapters on design, measurement, and quantitative and qualitative methods. Also, the book includes information on how to enhance scholarly impact throughout, in addition to the stand-alone dedicated Chapter 16. We conduct research for our satisfaction and, frankly, our career advancement, but we also do so to hopefully improve individual well-being, organisational performance, and society. So, high-quality and rigorous research does not end with the publication of an article - it is followed by efforts to ensure our research reaches broad audiences who may benefit from it.

A unique pedagogical feature of this book is that it is modular. Think about how we listen to music. If we want to hear a specific song, we don't have to listen to all the other pieces in that playlist before we get to the one we want, right? We go straight to the song we want and listen to that specific one. If readers are interested in a particular methodological topic, they don't have to read all the other chapters first. The book will be helpful based on readers' specific needs and interests because they can choose their level of depth depending on their needs. In other words, although the chapters are organised following the usual sequential stages of the research process, readers can go directly to sections, chapters, and even chapter content (e.g., figure, table, example, 'methods in practice' box) based on particular needs at a particular time without the need to, for example, read Chapter 3 before reading Chapter 4.





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Sound research methods are now needed more than ever. Society demands them, and business schools can and should deliver them

The table of contents is sufficiently detailed to allow you, as an instructor, researcher, journal reviewer or editor, or researcher-in-training, to refer to the specific topic of interest:

- 1: How to Understand the Current Methodological Landscape
- 2: How to Conduct Ethical Research
- 3: How to Make Contributions to Theory
- 4: How to Plan Your Research
- 5: How to Collect Your Sample Using Surveys and Other Means
- 6: How to Measure Your Variables
- 7: How to Design and Conduct Experimental Research
- 8: How to Prepare Your Data for Analysis
- 9: How to Conduct Quantitative Analysis, Part I: Regression-based Approaches
- 10: How to Conduct Quantitative Analysis, Part II: Multilevel Modeling
- 11: How to Conduct Quantitative Analysis, Part III: Meta-analysis
- 12: How to Conduct Quantitative Analysis, Part IV: Advanced Techniques
- 13: How to Conduct Qualitative Research
- 14: How to Report Your Results
- 15: How to Improve the Transparency, Reproducibility, and Replicability of Your Research
- 16: How to Enhance the Impact of Your Research.

Sound research methods are now needed more than ever. Society demands them, and business schools can and should deliver them. I sincerely hope this book will help you achieve this lofty goal, whether you are a student just starting with research, a junior or seasoned researcher, or a university leader interested in helping faculty and students ‘improve their research game’.

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#### About the Author

Herman Aguinis is the Avram Tucker Distinguished Scholar and Professor of Management at the George Washington University School of Business. His work focuses on the global acquisition and deployment of talent in organisations and organisational research methods (i.e., behavioural science and data science).

#### Recommended Readings:

Aguinis, H. (2025) *Research methodology: Best practices for rigorous, credible, and impactful research*. Sage Publications.

Aguinis, H., E.E. Archibold and D.B. Rice (2022) *Let’s fix our own problem: Quelling the irresponsible research perfect storm*. *Journal of Management Studies*, 59(6): 1628-1642. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12814>

Aguinis, H., C. Cummings, R.S. Ramani and T.G. Cummings (2020) *“An A is an A.” The new bottom line for valuing academic research*. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 34(1): 135-154. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0193>

Aguinis, H., L. Yu and C. Tosun (2021) *How to enhance scholarly impact: Recommendations for university administrators, researchers and educators*. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(8): 2485-2499. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2020-1189>