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Rejoinder: Toward an overarching signaling framework – The editorial teams of North American accounting association journals

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Our paper *Signaling effects of scholarly profiles – The editorial teams of North American accounting association journals* (Endenich and Trapp, 2018) responds to a call to “evaluate the diversity” (Kachelmeier, 2010, p. 2185) of the editorial teams of leading North American accounting association journals (see also Salterio, 2013). We very much appreciate the broad and diverse feedback we have received¹ and thank Yves Gendron (editor handling our initial paper) as well as Marcia Annisette and Christine Cooper (editors) for bringing this discussion to the attention of a broader readership as we genuinely consider such critical reflection and exchange the very essence of any research. Moreover, we are grateful to Christopher S. Chapman, Timothy J. Fogarty, Dana R. Hermanson, Steven J. Kachelmeier, Robin W. Roberts and Steven E. Salterio for their thoughtful comments on our paper. Given that this rejoinder does not allow us to respond to every single comment brought forward, we will focus on those selected comments that might result in a more overarching signaling framework.² By doing so, we argue that various comments provided in this forum do not contradict but can fruitfully complement our initial theoretical model.

With our paper, we intended to bring some empirical evidence to the longstanding yet widely ‘anecdotal’ debate about the role that leading accounting journals and their senior editors play in the construction of the potentially increasing homogeneity of accounting research (see this issue for further interesting examples of such ‘anecdotal’ evidence).³ As a theoretical model, our signaling framework represents a simplification of reality. More specifically, we focused on one signal – editorial team compositions – that we consider important, yet, without neglecting the existence of other signals. As we were particularly interested in how the signals sent by the *Contemporary Accounting Research* (CAR) and *The Accounting Review* (TAR) editorial team compositions developed, our theoretical framework takes into consideration that over time journals may signal openness for an increasing range of research approaches or adherence to the status quo. We consider this distinction to be important as it emphasizes the signal strength of the editorial team composition relative to others. We agree that ad hoc reviewers represent an additional signal (Kachelmeier, 2018). However, according to our understanding, ad hoc reviewers are selected in reaction to submissions. The composition of the editorial team may be *proactively* shaped by the senior editor in order to signal openness. If a journal is open for an increasing range of research approaches, the composition of the editorial team seems a powerful *first-stage* signal. In contrast, the selection of ad hoc reviewers seems less likely to be able to change the

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¹ Interestingly, this feedback was diverse not only across but also within research paradigms and is only partially represented in this forum as it also included informal feedback. The overall reactions seem to range from full support to broad rejection of our theoretical arguments and comprised more emotional statements such as “Aren’t you afraid to end up on TAR’s black list?” While we do not know whether such a black list implicitly or explicitly exists, the simple fact of having received such broad feedback might be indicative for the importance of the subject under study.

² This focus does not imply that we do not appreciate the critique brought forward with regard to the empirical design of our article (Fogarty, 2018; Hermanson, 2018; Kachelmeier, 2018).

³ Given this research objective, and even if we are not sure whether research providing surprising results is per se “better” (Fogarty, 2018, p. 2) than research not putting forward surprising results, we acknowledge (but are not surprised by) the critique of failing “to offer much surprise value” (ibid, p. 2). Note that page references to this issue are to the *Article in Press* versions.

status quo because it is an ex-post signal that corroborates the initial signal with a time lag if it is adequately translated by the receivers.⁴

From our perspective, the same applies to a journal's publications. We fully agree with Hermanson (2018) that the papers published in the journal are likely to encourage authors who identify a match between their own manuscript and the papers published in the journal and consequently represent an important signal (see also Fogarty, 2018). However, assuming that publications are not proactively selected by editors, publications appear as a rather weak signal of openness toward an increasing range of research approaches but primarily one for an adherence to the status quo. However, if the composition of the editorial team signals openness and is adequately translated (i.e., leading to a more diverse set of submissions), a journal's publications may supplement the initial signal with a time lag. With reference to the signaling of openness, we thus consider the journal's publications to be a further important *second-stage* signal.

These considerations indicate the complexity inherent in the interplay between the signals sent by various parties. In this context, Kachelmeier (2018) argues that journals are not senders, but rather receivers of signals sent by the academic accounting community, implying that journals simply reflect what is submitted. We acknowledge that the treatment of the community as passive translators of the signals sent by journals simplifies reality but to a similar degree as a framework conceiving journals as passive receivers of signals sent by the community.⁵ We agree that the community also sends signals. However, it appears questionable whether these signals represent an unconditional expression of needs. Instead, our empirical findings with regard to the method expertise represented in the CAR editorial teams and its (lagged) echo in the form of publications suggest that the signal sent by the community in terms of submissions might be *conditional* on the signals it receives from the journal. Against this background, an alternative interpretation of the signals sent by the community is that they manifest the community's beliefs regarding which research approaches might be suitable for submission. Moreover, if an association journal considers the signals sent by the community important, it falls short if it would only consider submissions and neglect another important signal from the community: non-submissions.

In light of these considerations, we further develop our framework toward a more overarching signaling framework (see Fig. 1). Future research might analyze which signals are powerful (and costly for the sender) and which signals remain “cheap talk” (Salterio, 2018). In addition to the distinction between first-stage and second-stage signals as well as the interplay between the signals sent by a journal and its reflection in terms of (non-)submissions, this framework explicitly acknowledges that the accounting academe is embedded in an institutional setting comprising, *inter alia*, accounting practice (e.g., Kaplan, 2011), academic accounting associations and PhD programs (e.g., Fogarty & Jones, 2010) and which is increasingly shaped by journal rankings, accreditation bodies and performance measurement in universities (e.g., Humphrey & Gendron, 2015). This extension reemphasizes that the diversification of editorial teams is one important step which “needs to be accompanied by further endeavors” (Enderich and Trapp, 2018, p. 18). In this regard, we agree with Chapman (2018) and Kachelmeier (2018) that a diversification of editorial teams (even beyond paradigms) will not automatically result in a holistic illumination of accounting practice if the methodological divide lingers on.⁶ Yet, we assume that leading journals that are dedicated to both positivism as well as interpretivism may dismantle barriers between paradigms and encourage cross-paradigmatic readership, understanding and cooperation.⁷

In closing, we raise the question whether the reflecting perspective and the signaling framework are mutually exclusive. We are aware that well-established journals like CAR and TAR are unlikely to neglect their own long-standing histories and create editorial teams that are de-coupled from their historical trajectories. This argumentation is in line with our observation that CAR's signal of greater openness does not imply a radical change. Our data (Enderich and Trapp, 2018, Table 6) show that scholars with an expertise in archival research represent the majority of the editorial team members of CAR in the most recent years – potentially because CAR receives a vast majority of submissions in this area (e.g., Salterio, 2013). Yet, our correlation analyses as well as time series regressions suggest that, for instance, the inclusion of a limited number of field and case researchers might be a sufficient signal to encourage submissions (and eventually publications) relying on these methods. We thus argue that an encouragement to build on diverse research approaches does not require radical changes in the editorial team composition. Instead, it might be expedient to signal greater openness by *extending* the research approaches represented by the editorial team members. Encouraging a diverse set of submissions does not seem to require an *equal* representation of *all*, but rather the *mere* representation of *various* methods and subject areas. Against this background, we neither suggest to mechanically maximize diversity irrespective of historical submission frequencies⁸

⁴ Moreover, an editorial appointment is obviously a much stronger, more persistent and better observable signal than appearing in a nine-page list of ad hoc reviewers. In other words, while an editorial appointment is a costly signal for the senior editor, ad hoc reviewers are not costly. We moreover argue, that even the same tier of signals (e.g., editorial appointments) might have different costs and different signaling power. In this context, referring to Merchant to demonstrate openness toward field-based research (Kachelmeier, 2018; Evans III, 2014) seems worth mentioning as Merchant (2010, p. 119) himself considers his “days as a survey and field researcher [...] largely over”. Instead, he reports having turned to use “economic theories and models and find large databases on which to test them” in light of the evaluation systems of his university (ibid., p. 119). While we greatly admire Professor Merchant's work, his appointment on the TAR editorial team can thus be considered a low-risk and low-cost signal for senior editors.

⁵ This argumentation is supported by Salterio's (2018) illustration that the composition of the editorial team was an important part of CAR's diversity strategy.

⁶ Indicative for this issue is the observation by Roberts (2018) that papers on corporate social responsibility (CSR) published in TAR largely ignore the insights gathered by CSR papers from Accounting, Organizations and Society as well as the Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal – two journals that are considered as interpretive according to the survey by Lowe and Locke (2005).

⁷ Kachelmeier's (2018) statement that he “gained a deeper respect for qualitative field and case research and the ways in which such research can complement the more positivistic research traditions” (p. 6) after reading Ahrens and Chapman (2006) seems to be indicative for this view.

Fig. 1. Toward an overarching signaling framework.

nor expect senior editors to trump their own research preferences (see Kachelmeier, 2018). Given that all commentators seem to agree – at least in principle – that research diversity matters, it is not about constructing our own academic Elysium but about bringing our discipline forward. We consider this forum an important step in this direction and sincerely thank all those engaged in it.

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⁸ Given that CAR and TAR had – at least in the past – the same main target audience (Qu, Ding, & Lukasewich, 2009), we suggest to interpret the diversity indices *relatively to each other* instead of comparing them with the highest possible diversity.