

Call for Contributions
Special Issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*
Pre-Registered Research on Business Ethics: Critical Inquiry and Practical Application

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Honesty and transparency, and the trust they are meant to generate, are often described as being fundamental to research because they facilitate the development and deployment of shared practices and discourse that constitute science and its relationship with society. This special issue will interrogate these topics in relation to recent efforts to increase trust in quantitative research through the practice of pre-registering empirical, hypothetico-deductive studies before analyzing data. This will be done in two themes: 1) *empirical contributions* that follow the logic of pre-registration; and 2) critical *theoretical or empirical work* that evaluates the logic and practice of hypothesis testing and/or pre-registration. We elaborate on these themes in turn.

Theme 1: Empirical contributions that follow the logic of pre-registration

In terms of pre-registered empirical contributions, this special issue seeks papers that test business ethics theories and hypotheses that have not yet been subjected to systematic replication research or which remain contested. We welcome studies that aim to provide direct replications of prior studies, for example in the case of experimental research, as well as conceptual replication in which the context of the study, such as time, place, or industry varies from the original study, for example in case of field research. Moreover, we welcome studies that test hypotheses for the first time based on well-reasoned theory or previous exploratory research. All types of hypothesis testing research in the field of business ethics is welcome, including but not limited to experimental designs, surveys and mixed method studies.

The value of an initial proposal for a study will be evaluated based on explanations of (1) why the research is important for business ethics, (2) why the proposed sampling approach and data collection capture the studied phenomenon well in terms of validity, and (3) which precautions are taken to ensure that data collection and analysis will be conducted in a transparent and trustworthy manner. Research plans that convince reviewers and editors on these three points will be accepted in-principle, indicating that a study which follows the agreed-upon research plan will be published no matter its findings. The authors have 9 months time to collect and analyse data and to complete the writing of the manuscript. Final manuscripts will again be reviewed to ensure that the research plan was followed and that the manuscript is meeting all quality standards of the *Journal of Business Ethics* in terms of writing, reasoning, analysis and methodological rigor. For more details on this process, please see the editorial by Roloff and Zyphur (2018) on this topic. **Theme 1 deadline for submissions is January 1st, 2019.**

Theme 2: Critical inquiry into hypothesis testing research and pre-registration

The second theme is aimed at empirical and/or theoretical work on how the first theme and its *raison d'être* can be critically understood in relation to topics such as the ethics of transparency, honesty, trust, reflexivity, data, epistemology, ontology, and the link between science and society. This theme offers a space for critical perspectives on concepts, practices, and institutional arrangements that are often uncritically accepted by hypothesis-testing researchers.

There many ways to craft papers for this critical inquiry. To begin, the emphasis on making correct inferences under uncertainty that motivates pre-registration can be understood in relation to a problem of trust—trust in researchers, quantitative results, and so forth. Some quantitative researchers recognize this, noting that “trust and uncertainty are related concepts: any reduction in uncertainty associated with a model is directly proportional to the level of trust associated with the model” (Benjamin, Vadakkevedu & Ramachandran 2017, p. 290). However, such a view of trust glosses over ethical and other implications of such logics.

Research in the sociology and history of knowledge shows that mechanisms for generating trust are foundational for creating knowledge communities and their commitments—including practices, discourse, research objects/subjects (e.g., see Jasanoff 2004, 2009, 2010, 2014; Leonelli, Rappert & Davies 2017; Poovey 1998; Porter 1996; Shapin & Schaffer 1985). By focusing narrowly on a specific set of epistemic and ontological commitments, the effort to pre-register research in order to enforce a particular brand of hypothetico-deductivism overlooks wider ethical and other implications of this enforcement. Different epistemic cultures value different ways of treating knowledge and concepts such as uncertainty (Knor-Cetina 2009, 2013), and the practical implications of specific epistemic and ontological commitments can be interrogated in order to assess their value rather than purchased wholesale on terms that are then used to produce rules for the conduct of research (see Dewey 1920, 1938; Fish 1985, 2003; van Fraassen 2008). As one example, by eliminating exploratory practices in the analysis of data, what important skills may be lost amongst quantitative researchers? As a second example, what kinds of personal responsibilities and the selves who may have them are lost or ‘colonized’ by the logic of formal pre-registration and other tools for enforcing hypothetico-deductivism?

With this in mind, the second theme of the special issue seeks to understand the ethical, practical, epistemic, ontological, institutional, and other implications of the drive to enforce a kind of hypothetico-deductivism. Whether through pre-registration or other methods, this effort is ostensibly meant to create trustworthy results, but the way this is being organized across the physical and social sciences begs critical questions about the rationale that justifies the approach. Trust can come from many sources, such as reflexivity (Finlay 2002), but the drive towards hypothetico-deductivism appears to be an effort to dominate the discourse surrounding trust, in part, with a quantitative model of inference under a probabilistic form of uncertainty.

Furthermore, the idea that pre-registration and related activities are a way of increasing transparency in the practice of research is an open question. Will pre-registration work as purported, or will researchers find other ways to engage in exploratory analyses? Perhaps more importantly, is an effort toward a hypothetico-deductive understanding of the research process really the best way to conceptualize how research can be made transparent? Perhaps not, as the goals of transparency can have serious consequences (see Strathern 2000; Tsoukas 1997).

To address such consequences, the second theme of this issue invites submissions that explore and perhaps serve to guard against the uncritical adoption of pre-registration and its logic. Critical inquiry on this topic may be theoretical or empirical, and submissions will be evaluated using the typical high standards of the *Journal of Business Ethics*. **Theme 2 deadline for submissions is July 1st, 2019.**

For more details see: Roloff, J. & Zyphur, M. J. 2018. Null Findings, Replications, and Pre-Registered Studies in Business Ethics Research. *Journal of Business Ethics*