

Working in Industrial/Employment relationships: Impact of the ERA journal ranking for Australian and New-Zealander academics

A survey conducted by the Association of Industrial Relations' Academics in Australia and New-Zealand



For further information contact:

Dr Suzanne Young

AIRAANZ Secretary

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email: s.h.young@latrobe.edu.au

Ph: +61 3 94793140

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1. Executive Summary

The study of the employee-employer relationship through industrial relations or employment relations (IR/ER) has been a field of research for over a century, part of university courses since the 1920s in the US, the 1930s in the UK and the 1950s in Australia. This paper analyses the impact of the 2010 journal rankings system introduced as part of the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) initiative, on the field of IR/ER. (p 1)

The value of IR/ER lies in integrating micro and macro analysis, acknowledging power and competing goals and accepting fairness as an important criterion of analysis. The continuing study of IR/ER is of great significance for the wellbeing of Australian society, as wellbeing at or through work is a central element of overall wellbeing. (p 1)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics locates the IR field of research (FOR) at a six digit code that represents a sub-category of the four-digit 'management' code, but this location does not accurately depict the nature of IR/ER research. Its multidisciplinary character means it no more belongs as a sub-field of 'management' than it does of 'sociology', 'law', 'economics' or 'public policy'. The public policy implications of much IR/ER research are quite distinct from the firm-focused implications of the other 'management' fields of research, with which it is sometimes in conflict. (pp 1-2)

Several journals that had been ranked highly by AIRAANZ, and likewise ranked highly in the draft rankings issued by the ARC in 2008, were downgraded in the final 2010 rankings. Three of the four journals, ranked by AIRAANZ and in the draft ERA rankings as A*, were downgraded – in one case to B. No Australian IR/ER journals are in the A* ranking. (p 2)

This paper reports on results of an online survey of 101 present and past members of the AIRAANZ in November and December 2010. Some questions were targeted at respondents who had occupied decision-making positions within the previous three years. This report was prepared by Associate Professor Suzanne Young and Magalie Marais with Professor David Peetz. (p 3)

Five sixths of respondents with recent decision-making experience agreed that journal rankings had displaced other criteria in the decision-making processes within their university. Particular emphasis was placed on impacts on promotion decisions, internal grant and research fund allocations and recruitment practices. A number of decision makers identified negative impacts in open-ended questions, particularly in relation to the role of applied research in the community, the balance of criteria in performance assessment and the inadequate recognition of other forms of quality research such as books and chapters. (pp 5-7)

A significant proportion of respondents (36 per cent) said that by focusing on IR/ER they had been disadvantaged in obtaining top tier publications; only 3 per cent said working in IR/ER was an advantage in this respect. A very large majority – 61 per cent – of respondents indicated that the impact of ERA rankings on the IR/ER field would be

negative. Only 8 per cent said it would be positive. This in turn flowed through to the attractiveness of IR/ER for students: 37 per cent saw a negative impact, compared to 7 per cent seeing a positive impact. Analysis showed that the negative impact of ERA journal rankings on the IR/ER field was closely related to the disadvantage respondents felt in achieving top tier publications from being in the IR/ER field. Many respondents considered that too few relevant journals have been ranked A, and especially A*, in the field of IR/ER including in Australia. (pp 8-9)

Due to the ERA exercise, most respondents plan to change the journals to which they submit articles, by implication moving away from C journals. Indeed, 71 per cent plan to increase their submission focus on overseas journals at the expense of Australian journals. Almost half plan to increase their relative use of more generalist management or human resource management journals, which in turn implies a change in the focus of their research, as such journals tend to have less of an interest in public policy issues. (p 10)

There were strong perceptions of a negative impact of ERA journal rankings on careers: 48% evaluated it negatively while only 17% of the respondents gave a positive assessment. The negative career impact was strongly related to the impact that ERA had in downgrading the rating of IR/ER journals, in particular the resultant difficulty in obtaining publication in A or A* journals. Underlying this problem was the downgrading of the IR/ER field through the ERA process. Those who saw a negative impact of journal rankings on the IR/ER field were three times as likely as anyone else to see a negative impact on their career, and only one eighth as likely as others to see a positive impact on their career. Because most IR/ER academics felt that the impact of ERA journal rankings on the IR/ER field would be negative, the largest number also believed that the impact on their career would be negative. (pp 11-14)

IR/ER academics therefore expect negative effects on internal evaluation at work, allocation of internal and external grants and research funds, achieving promotion and obtaining a position in another university. (p 15)

The data suggest that the ERA journal rankings will disadvantage B-ranked (much of the top half of) Australian journals and be highly threatening to C-ranked Australian journals. Indeed, if academics follow the incentive structures put in place by their universities (as the data indicate they are doing), then it is difficult to see some of these journals surviving. (p 16)

A corollary of the possible closure of these Australian-based outlets is the disappearance of much Australian-based policy-relevant and applied research into employment and industrial relations. (p 16)

Overall, the evidence indicates that the ERA journal ranking system is strongly and negatively affecting the IR/ER field and could lead to the diminution of the number of Australian journals and researchers, and the amount of Australian research, in this field. Such consequences would likely be harmful for social progress in Australia. As Kaufman argues, 'real-life capitalism cannot survive without it'. (p 17)

2. Background

The study of the employee-employer relationship – referred to as industrial relations (IR), employment relations (ER) or industrial and employment relations – has been a field of study for over a century, part of university courses since the 1920s in the US, the 1930s in the UK and the 1950s in Australia. This paper analyses the impact of the 2010 journal rankings system introduced as part of the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) initiative. First, though, we briefly comment on the significance and (multi) disciplinarity of IR/ER and note the outcome of key IR journals under the ERA journal ranking process. We then discuss results of a survey of IR/ER academics on the impact on their discipline and working environments of the journal rankings and ERA processes.

(a) Significance

The value of IR/ER lies in ‘integrating micro and macro analysis, acknowledging power and competing goals in the employment relationship as central variables and accepting fairness as an important criterion [of analysis of the employment relationship]’ (Kelly 2003: 167). It is ‘the paradigm that exposes the contradictions that are at the heart of the employment relationship’ (Bailey 2003: 45). As Kaufmann (2004: 631) points out, ‘industrial relations seeks to humanize, stabilize, professionalize, democratize and balance the market system’.

It is immensely important for public policy. Its relevance to modern society is undiminished (eg Osterman, Kochan, Locke and Piore 2001), not least because ‘labour is being commodified across the global economy, inequality and insecurity are on the rise, global market forces are undermining national regulatory regimes, one out of six workers in the world economy are jobless or seriously underemployed, and workers’ interests are increasingly subordinated to consumers’ interests’ (Kaufman 2004:630). Recent periods have witnessed the decline of equity for employees in Australian organisations: increases in working hours and work intensification, the introduction and promotion of individual contracts, the reduction of union ‘voice’ in many workplaces (to name a few issues). Many of these changes have hit hardest those at the bottom of the labour market. ‘As long as employees and employers exist, the relations between them will be problematic, sometimes conflictual, and always in need of mechanism for dialogue, adjustment and regulation’ (Kaufman 2004:628). The continuing study of IR/ER is therefore of great significance for the wellbeing of Australian society, as wellbeing at or through work is a central element of overall wellbeing.

(b) Location of discipline

Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics locates the IR field of research (FOR) as a six digit code that represents a sub-category of the four-digit ‘management’ code, this location does not accurately depict the nature of IR/ER research. ‘The discipline of industrial relations takes theories and concepts from [the] traditional social science disciplines and uses them to study industrial relations’, including ‘economics, politics, law, history, sociology and psychology...That is to say, industrial relations, by the nature of its content, cannot be adequately studied by using only one traditional discipline’ (Sappey, Burgess, Lyons and Bultjens 2006:7-8).

This multidisciplinary character of IR/ER means that it no more belongs as a sub-field of 'management' than it does of 'sociology', 'law', 'economics' or 'public policy'. The public policy implications of much IR/ER research are quite distinct from the firm-focused implications of the other 'management' fields of research (Business Information Management ; Business Information Systems; Corporate Governance and Stakeholder Engagement; Entrepreneurship; Human Resources Management; Innovation and Technology Management; International Business; Logistics and Supply Chain Management; Organisation and Management Theory; Organisational Behaviour; Organisational Planning and Management; Quality Management; Small Business Management; Business and Management not elsewhere classified), the aims of which are to maximise one or another aspect of the efficient organisation of business. The aims of industrial relations study, while encompassing that, go much further to the efficient *and equitable* operation of society. This in turn means that some researchers in other fields of 'management' may be antagonistic to the aims or outcomes of the study of IR/ER. This lack of consonance between IR/ER and the 'management' FOR, and the very multidisciplinary nature of IR/ER, mean it would be best considered as a four-digit FOR in its own right.

(c) Treatment of IR/ER journals under ERA

Perhaps for the above reasons, or perhaps for unrelated reasons, key IR/ER journals did not fare well in the final version of the ERA journal ranking issued in 2010. Several journals that had been ranked highly by AIRAANZ, and likewise ranked highly in the draft rankings issued by the ARC in 2008, were downgraded in the final 2010 rankings. Table 1 below lists the major downgradings that occurred. What is particularly noteworthy is that three of the four journals, ranked by AIRAANZ and in the draft ERA rankings as A*, were downgraded. In one case, one of the two leading IR/ER journals in the United States (*Industrial and Labor Relations Review*) was downgraded from A* to B.

In addition, it is noteworthy that no Australian IR/ER journals are in the A* ranking, and only the *Journal of Industrial Relations* is in the A ranking (although historians in the IR/ER field are also able to aim to publish in the Australian journal *Labour History*).

Table 1: Major IR/ER Journal Downgradings in 2010 ERA

	AIRAANZ 2007	ERA draft 2008	ERA final 2010
British Journal of Industrial Relations	A*	A*	A
Human Resource Management (US)	A*	A*	A
Industrial and Labor Relations Review	A*	A*	B
Economic and Industrial Democracy	A	A	B
Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations	A	A	B
Australian Bulletin of Labour	B	B	C
New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations	B	B	C

It is in this context that the AIRAANZ survey of the impact of the ERA journal rankings was undertaken.

3. Survey objectives and methodology

The survey was developed in response to discussion at the 2010 AIRAANZ Annual General Meeting and on subsequent direction of the AIRAANZ Executive. The aim was to gain data to provide a greater evidence-based understanding of the consequences of the ERA ranking for staff and universities involved in IR/ER; this included to study the consequences of this ranking on careers (including promotion, recruitment, grants) and universities in general.

The development of the survey was primarily conducted by Associate Professor Suzanne Young (Secretary of AIRAANZ) and a PhD student, Magalie Marais, in consultation with Professor Ray Markey, AIRAANZ President. All of the AIRAANZ executive members collectively contributed to review and to improve the survey. Several questions used scales that assessed both the strength of an impact and its valence (positive or negative). An online survey creation tool called “Qualtrics” was used to edit and distribute the survey to the AIRAANZ members. More than 300 members and past-members obtained from the AIRAANZ membership data base were emailed to gain their responses. The survey was open for three weeks between 24 November and 15 December 2010. One hundred and one responses were collected with a response rate of close to 33%, which is quite high for an electronic survey.

The answers were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. This report has been written by Associate Professor Suzanne Young and Magalie Marais with Professor David Peetz (executive member of AIRAANZ). A preliminary version of the results was publicly presented at the 25th AIRAANZ Conference on 4 February 2011 in Auckland, New Zealand.

4. Respondent characteristics

One hundred and one respondents answered the survey. All of them are attached to a university of Australia or New Zealand and, by being members of AIRAANZ, have demonstrated an interest for the field of Industrial and Employment Relations. Some demographic characteristics have been collected in order to better interpret the results of the survey (Appendix A). There were slightly more female than male respondents (54% to 46%), and 78% were older than 40 years of age. Respondents' experience in the university sector was also significant with 63% having worked in this sector for more than 10 years (85% for more than 6 years). Respondents' current positions are diverse with 12% of respondents being PhD/MPhil Students, 6% Casual Lecturers, 14% Lecturers, 29% Senior Lecturers, 18% Associate Professors and 15% Professors. The tenure of respondents in their current positions varies and demonstrates different stages in respondents' career progression (Appendix 1). The composition of the sample in regard to their positions is an interesting dimension worth noting because of the high percentage of respondents that are concerned about the ERA on their potential career progression opportunities (about 75%). For people involved in decision-making or high level positions (38% of the respondents have been a member of a selection committee, 19% have been involved in allocating university research grants and 15% have been head of School/Department or member of a promotion committee), the ERA ranking demonstrates changes to university practices.

In particular, respondents' experience in IR/ER (Table 2) is extensive with most of them having been involved in this field for more than 10 years (71%). The amount of time spent by respondents in IR/ER varies but most of the respondents declared a significant time commitment to this field (about 60% declared spending more than 40% of their working time in this field)

Table 2 : Length of respondents' experience and time spent in the field of IR/ER

Length of respondents' involvement in the field of IR/ER (%)	
1- 3 years	5.3
4-5 years	8.5
6-10 years	14.9
11-20 years	45.7
More	25.5
Time spent in the field of IR/ER at work (%)	
0%	1.1
1-19%	17.0
20-40%	22.3
41-59%	18.1
60+%	41.5

5. Impact of the ERA Journal ranking exercise on academic decision making

To understand the consequences of the ERA ranking for IR/ER academics, we assessed its impacts on decision-making processes within the university. Our results show that this ranking had had a strong impact on decision-makers especially by replacing traditional decision-making or evaluative criteria (Table 3).

Table 3: Impact of the ERA ranking in displacing other criteria in the decision-making process within the university (%)

Yes	83.6
No	16.4

We asked about specific areas in which Journal Rankings may have had an impact. Table 4 shows that large proportions of AIRAANZ members with decision making experience within their universities had witnessed strong impacts of the ERA on the decision making processes. Some 52 per cent of decision makers indicated a ‘strong’ or ‘very strong’ impact on internal promotions (only 17 per cent reported a ‘slight impact’ or ‘no impact’). In addition, 46 per cent reported strong or very strong impacts on internal grants and funding allocations, 47 per cent on recruitment, and 48 per cent on external grants allocations, all well above the proportions reporting little or no impact.

Table 4: Impact of the ERA ranking on decision-making processes within the university

%	No Impact	Slight Impact	Moderate Impact	Strong Impact	Very Strong Impact	Don't know
Recruitment	15.8	3.5	14	22.8	24.6	19.3
Internal Promotion	10.2	6.8	11.9	22.0	30.5	18.6
Internal grants/research funds allocation	14.0	10.5	8.8	22.8	22.8	21.1
External grants/research funds allocation	9.3	9.3	3.7	29.6	18.5	29.6
Allocation of teaching loads in IR/ER field	29.8	5.3	17.5	14.0	17.5	15.8
OSP/Sabbatical leave	18.5	14.8	11.1	13.0	18.5	24.1

When we asked respondents about the nature of the criteria that the ERA Ranking have replaced, some of them put the emphasis on the value of this exercise to promote transparency in researchers’ performance measure (instead of network nepotism), to

avoid a numerical count of publications and to easily measure the impact of the research (Table 5). If some of them agree in the recognition of these advantages, limitations are also clearly underlined. The main regret of respondents concerns the domination of the research criteria in decision-making at the expense of the diversity of the service academics are involved with. They especially criticize the fact that *“the ERA ranking has become an end in itself and resulted in additional criteria being applied for promotion, appointments, etc”* and respondents are looking for a more balanced measure of their work within the university. This negative point does not necessarily refer to the weaknesses of the ERA ranking in itself. Indeed, it appears more linked to the way universities are using this ranking.

However, other comments directly concern the limits of the ranking process of ERA. Respondents explain, first, that this ranking does not always reveal the quality of publications and in its use focused decision-makers to ignore other types of research contribution. The *“wide range of research contribution is now replaced by a very restrictive assessment of the research quality”* explained one respondent.

The second issue quoted by respondents, and probably the most important one, is related to the impact on the promotion of the field with major application issues for institutions, industry and the community in general. IR/ER researchers defend the value of this area especially for *“institutional progress and public policy”*.

Table 5: Impact of the ERA ranking in displacing other criteria in the decision-making process within the university: Open-ended questions

Nature of the comment	Label of the comment	Number of quotes
POSITIVE	Replacement of numerical measure of publication	2
	Replacement of network nepotism /More transparency	2
	Easier measure of impact (e.g. citations)	1
NEGATIVE	Quality of the service and experience in general	2
	More attention to category one grants and A journals compared to other type of research contributions (other paper, book-chapter, conferences...). Not a complete measure of the quality of publications	5
	Teaching and leadership criteria => Exclusive focus on research and not well balanced measure of performance	12
	Importance of research for community/industry (applied research)	9

The results show that the ERA ranking could be focused on less restrictive and more favorable criteria to the IR/ER area (for example the value of qualitative research, or importance of national context). Moreover the impact of the ERA on the IR/ER field in general clearly indicated the potential for diminishing its status - a field with high social impacts and with strong positive consequences for institutions in regard to the

application of the research to industry and public policy. The results of this survey also underline how universities could alter their use of the ERA in selecting and evaluating researchers, that seems for the moment not well-balanced, to value the global contribution of academics within their universities.

In the rest of this report, we consider the impact that the ranking system has had at the individual level, as perceived by the membership of AIRAANZ at large.

6. Perceived impact on industrial and employment relations as a field

We asked respondents whether, by focusing and working in IR/ER, this had advantaged or disadvantaged them in achieving A or A* ('top tier') publications. Some 36 per cent of respondents said that, by focusing on IR/ER, they had been disadvantaged in obtaining top tier publications; only 3 per cent said working in IR/ER was an advantage in this respect (Table 6).

Table 6: Impact of focusing on IR/ER for achieving A or A* publications (%)

Advantaged	3.2
Disadvantaged	35.5
Neither advantaged or disadvantaged	40.9
Don't know	20.4
Total	100.0

We also asked respondents to indicate the extent to which the ERA rankings could have a negative or positive impact on promotion of the IR/ER field, its attractiveness to students, and the ranking and attractiveness of their department and organisation. A very large majority – 61 per cent – of respondents indicated that the impact of ERA rankings on the IR/ER field would be negative (Table 7). Only 8 per cent said it would be positive. This in turn flowed through to the attractiveness of IR/ER for students: 37 per cent saw a negative impact there, compared to 7 per cent seeing a positive impact.

Table 7: Expected impact of the ERA Ranking on respondents' work areas (%)

	Strongly negative	Negative	Evenly balanced between negative and positive	Positive	Strongly positive	No impact	Don't know
Promotion of the IE/ER field	12.9	48.4	8.1	4.8	3.2	9.7	12.9
Attractiveness of IR/ER for students	7.1	30.4	12.5	3.6	3.6	12.5	30.4
Ranking of your department	8.2	32.8	13.1	19.7	3.3	6.6	16.4
Attractiveness of your organization	6.8	28.8	10.2	15.3	3.4	10.2	25.4

The negative impact of ERA journal rankings on the IR/ER field was clearly related to the disadvantage respondents felt in achieving top tier publications. Amongst those who saw a negative impact on the IR/ER field, some 63 percent believed they were disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publications, none felt advantaged. By contrast, amongst those who saw a balanced or no impact on the field, only 18 per cent felt disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publications, and amongst the small number who saw a positive impact on the field, none felt disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publication and 13 per cent felt advantaged (Table 8).

Table 8: Relationship between expected impact of ERA journal rankings on IR/ER field and whether rankings advantage or disadvantaged respondents in achieving A or A* publications (%)

	<i>Non-negative impact on IR/ER field</i>			<i>Negative impact on IR/ER field</i>
	Positive	Balanced or no impact	Total non-negative	
Advantaged in achieving A or A* publications	13	0	5	3
Disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publications	0	18	11	63
Neither/ don't know	88	82	84	34
Total	100	100	100	100
N	8	11	19	38

Many respondents consider that too few relevant journals have been ranked A, and especially A*, in the field of IR/ER in Australia – there were 21 spontaneous quotes about this issue (Table 9).

Table 9: Impact of the ERA ranking on reaching A or A* publications: open-ended question

Nature of the comment	Label of the comment	Number of quotes
ADVANTAGED	IR/ER journals are ranked A thanks to lobbying in this field	1
NEITHER ADVANTAGED OR DISADVANTAGED	Necessity to develop creativity to go further than pure “IR field”	1
DISADVANTAGED	Materials and data don’t suit A journals/ Quantitative Bias	2
	Few A or A+ journals in this field in Australia	21
	Dependency of Australian journals because of embeddedness in a very specific context and not interesting for international journal	9
	American bias in the listing	2
	Bias in the quality of the ranking	3
	Familiarity with the journals	1
	Difficulties in accessing funds	1

Respondents explain the intense competition created by this rarity and the necessity for Australian researchers to publish in other journals (81% of the respondents) (Table 10) or, in most cases, in journals based in other countries. By implication, those 81 per cent will reduce their submissions to C journals (including Australian C journals). Indeed, because of the ERA ranking, 72% of respondents declare that they are more likely to publish in a journal based overseas at the expense of Australian journals. Almost half plan to increase their relative use of more generalist management of human resource management journals, which in turn implies a change in the focus of their research, as such journals tend to have less of an interest in public policy issues.

Table 10: Impact of the ERA ranking in respondents’ publication strategy

	Change in journals to submit to (%)	Submission in journal based overseas (%)	Submission to more generalist Management, HRM or other journals (%)	Change of the field of research (%)
YES	80.6	71.7	47.4	12.3
NO	19.4	28.3	52.6	87.7

However, even if this is possible and seen as a positive driver for Australasian academics to internationalize their research, another issue appears. As explained by the following respondent:

To a large extent research in industrial/employment relations is more context-dependent than research in the other disciplines or fields of study. Hence research conducted in a specific context might not be considered relevant by researchers working in other environments. In the Australian context, the recent focus of much industrial/employment relations research has been connected with the Australian laws, policy, and developments. Consequently, Australian research is tied to the Australian context, and thus generally of diminished relevance to non-Australian journals. As a result, this deters both publication of Australian focused research in more highly ranked journals. For example, no Australian journal is ranked "A" in the Business and Management (1503) rankings, and only 2 Australian journals are ranked in the "A" category (Journal of Industrial Relations and Labour History).*

The qualitative methods often used in IR/ER research (as volunteered and reported in Table 9) also create significant issues for Australian researchers wishing to publish in highly ranked journals, with the A and A* journals often preferencing quantitative research. Such difficulties also appear for researchers interesting in publishing in more generalist journals (Human Resources Management or Management).

7. Impact on publishing and careers

For individuals the highest negative rating directly concerns respondents' career and promotion. Some respondents spontaneously declared that the journal rankings could create issues during the recruitment process or for the attributions of grants/ research funds. One respondent explained that

so few ER/IR journals are A, the quality of many of our As are well above other disciplines' A*, applying for ARC grants under the B&M college makes it very difficult to access Discovery funding. This is despite the massive 'impact' and resonance of our work with 'end users' (including business, employees and regulators).*

Respondents were asked to assess the impact of the ERA Journal ranking exercise on their own careers. When respondents were asked about the impact of the ranking in general on their careers, a large percentage, 48%, evaluated it negatively. Only 17% of the respondents gave a positive assessment and the rest of the respondents seem undecided or expected little net change (Table 11). As the ERA ranking has been developed to assess the quality of journals in order to maintain a high research quality, it is noteworthy that for academics involved in IR/ER this ranking was perceived as having a strongly negative impact.

Table 11: Perceived impact of the ERA journal ranking exercise for the respondents' career in general (%)

Strongly negative	7.8
Negative	40.6
Evenly balanced between positive and negative	15.6
Positive	9.4
Strongly positive	7.8
Don't know	18.8
Total	100.0

The difficulties encountered during the publication process for Australian researchers may have significant consequences for their career progression. Table 12 shows that 28 per cent feel that, overall, their being in IR/ER has disadvantaged them in reaching their career levels and positions, whereas only 6 per cent see themselves as advantaged. The lower percentages here probably reflect the fact that the ERA journal rankings are only one of several influences on the impact that being in IR/ER has had on their career progression to date. Its impact, however, can be expected to increase in future.

Table 12: Impact of focusing on IR/ER in reaching career levels and positions (%)

Advantaged	5.5
Disadvantaged	27.5
Neither advantaged or disadvantaged	52.7
Don't know	14.3
Total	100.0

The career impact of the ERA system as indicated in Table 11 was strongly related to the impact that ERA had in downgrading the rating of IR/ER journals, in particular the resultant difficulty in obtaining publication in A or A* journals. Amongst those who saw their opportunities to publish in A or A* journals hampered by the ERA rankings, as many as 77 per cent believed the impact of ERA on their career would be negative (Table 13). By contrast, amongst those who believed the ERA had not disadvantaged them in achieving A or A* publications, perceived career impacts were quite evenly split between those who saw a negative career impact (27 per cent) and a positive career impact (33 per cent) with 40 per cent not identifying a career impact (either evenly balanced or 'don't know').

Table 13: Relationship between career impact of journal rankings system and whether respondent disadvantaged in obtaining top tier journal publications through being focused on IR/ER (%)

	Non-disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publications			Disadvantaged in achieving A or A* publications
	Advantaged in achieving A or A* publications	neither advantaged not disadvantaged	Total Non-disadvantaged	
Negative career impact	0	29	27	77
Evenly balanced or don't know	50	39	40	23
Positive career impact	50	32	33	0
Total	100	100	100	100
N	2	28	30	26

Underlying this problem is the downgrading of the IR/ER field through the ERA process. The factor driving the negative career impact of ERA on IR/ER academics is the impact that ERA has on the field. Amongst those respondents who saw that ERA journal rankings would have a negative impact on the IR/ER field, some 71 per cent felt that ERA would have a negative career impact. Overall, amongst those who expected no negative impact on the field, 19 per cent thought ERA would have a negative impact on their career compared to 38 per cent perceiving a positive impact, with 44 per cent expecting no difference. Amongst the small sub-group who saw ERA journal rankings would benefit the IR/ER field, four fifths expected a positive career impact for them (Table 14). In other words, those who saw a negative impact of journal rankings on the IR/ER field were three times as likely as anyone else to see a negative impact on their career, and only one eighth as likely to see a positive impact on their career. But because most IR/ER academics felt that the impact of ERA journal rankings on the IR/ER field would be negative, the largest number also believed that the impact on their career would be negative.

Table 14: Relationship between expected impact of rankings on IR/ER field and career impact (%)

	Non-negative impact on IR/ER field			Negative impact on IR/ER field
	Positive	Balanced or no impact	Total Non-negative impact	
Negative career impact	0	27	19	71
Evenly balanced or don't know	20	55	44	24
Positive career impact	80	18	38	5
Total	100	100	100	100
N	5	11	16	38

In spite of the challenges now facing the IR/ER field, many researchers involved in this area remain faithful to it. They defend and advocate the value added that their work could have in public debate and in management in general, and most would like if possible to stay within their current field of research (last column, Table 10). One respondent clearly expresses the value of his research area and the risks of the ERA ranking by explaining that *“I am a successful researcher who mentors many. The ERA is very negative for future researchers. It focuses on narrow instrumental goals, rather than doing good research, on important issues”*.

The recognition and importance of this domain, however, remains problematic in the university sector. Some respondents declare that IR/ER is not well valued compared to other fields of research. Some respondents talk about a less *“fashionable”* field compared to research that advances the interests of the employers. One respondent explains that

competing against accountants and marketing bodies, it is a different playing field. We do rigorous research; there are different measures for other business disciplines. Even when I have managed to get into an A journal, I have been told that it is 'just' an IR journal, and doesn't rank against OS, OA, Management journals ranked at the same ERA level. Very demoralizing and bad for career!*

These impacts seem stronger for people with long university tenure (more than 10 years). They especially regret the strong impact of the ERA ranking which sometimes replaces traditional “quality” criteria and explain the bad consequences that this process could have in attracting new students (especially graduate and post-graduate students) in this area. The IR/ER field indeed presents the weakness of being politically oriented and appears to external reviewers as a *“less serious field of research despite of the rigor of papers”* developed in it. One respondent explains that

I held senior positions in 2 universities in the past decade. I chose to shift my career overseas, because I found the ERA mindset and processes narrowing and ultimately destructive of scholarship and engaged research. That said, once overseas my career was not damaged by the negative judgment overseas universities have of ERA and its impact on scholarship.

Young researchers seem to suffer less in regard to the perceived positioning of the IR/ER field. Some of them even describe that their focus on IR/ER have been valued during their recruitment process as a rare and original qualification. One explains that “*working in my current and previous positions, IR expertise has been valued and not widely available, especially in combination with expertise on skill formation, education and training, etc*”. For others, the situation is more complicated as described by the following respondent who explained that he was “*originally advantaged because of a consistent publication track record but now disadvantaged because the Department only recognizes A* publications as significant*”.

Regarding these issues, most of the researchers have decided to adapt their research strategy to the ERA ranking by focusing on multi-disciplinary research or by developing creative way of combining different fields of research (especially for young researchers who integrate this at the very beginning of their career). One expresses solutions to overcome the difficulties presented by the ERA ranking by explaining that

I work and research in the ER/IR field but some of my publications are in multi-disciplinary social science journals. The ERA has provided some opportunity to gain recognition for publications in high quality journals that may not be familiar to senior colleagues who are grounded only in the management or HRM disciplines. I have developed a more creative way of doing research.

But he also regrets “*the non-recognized value*” of the IR/ER field. This point of view is shared by many other academics who are afraid of the potential risk of disappearance of a highly complex but ambitious and influential field of research.

In conclusion, the impact of the ERA ranking is judged mainly in a negative fashion by respondents especially in regard to the perpetuation of the IR/ER field which has important and original contributions to make for the whole country. Researchers involved in IR/ER also recognized the difficulties to score highly in publications by focusing on this qualitative and context-dependent area and underline the potential negative consequences that this could have on their careers. However, they mention as well solutions to overcome and to take advantage of the ERA ranking by developing new ways of doing research especially by developing multi-disciplinary approaches, by internationalizing their work or by playing the ERA game. In spite of these positives, other researchers declare being forced to abandon some desired publications or to publish overseas. This could represent a risk for IR/ER progress in the next couple of years.

8. Impact on other aspects of academic work

We also investigated in which particular areas of work the impact was most likely felt. These results (Table 15) demonstrate that the impact of the ERA ranking is expected as mainly negative in “internal evaluation at work” (46%), “external grants/research funds allocation” (44%), “achieving an internal/external promotion” (44%), “obtaining a position in another university” (44%) and “internal grants/research funds allocation” (36%). While positive effects were expected by significant proportions of respondents for “promotion” (26%) or “internal evaluation” (25%), in both cases the negatives clearly outweighed the positives. In three categories the biggest single response was that there was no expected impact: “Teaching Load”, OSP/Sabbatical Leave and “Wage and compensation allocation” (although even amongst these three the reduced numbers or negatives still outnumbered the positives).

Table15: Expected impact of the ERA Ranking on respondents’ work areas (%)

	Strongly negative	Negative	Evenly balanced between negative and positive	Positive	Strongly positive	No impact	Don't know
Achieving an Internal/External promotion	6.5	37.1	8.1	19.4	6.5	14.5	8.7
Obtaining a position in another university	8.1	35.5	11.3	16.1	8.1	6.5	14.5
Internal evaluation at work	11.5	34.4	16.4	19.7	4.9	8.2	4.9
Wage and compensation allocation	4.9	19.7	11.5	4.9	4.9	34.4	19.7
Teaching load	8.3	16.7	21.7	6.7	5.0	33.3	8.3
Internal grants/research funds allocation	5.1	30.5	15.3	11.9	10.2	15.3	11.9
External grants/research funds allocation	9.8	34.4	16.4	9.8	6.6	9.8	13.1
OSP/Sabbatical leave	5.0	13.3	21.7	6.7	5.0	25.0	23.3

9. Conclusions

The results generally show a negative impact of the AIRAANZ ranking for the field of IR/ER and consequently for the careers of academics involved in the field. There appear to be strong consequences in terms of “funds allocation”, “evaluation and promotion” as well as for “recruitment”.

The negative outcomes identified by respondents are mainly related to the difficulties of reaching A or A* journals in IR/ER, considering the small number of high ranked journals devoted to this subject that are Australian-based, and the compounding of difficulties arising from the downgrading of high level international journals (and some Australian and New Zealand journals) in the final ERA journal rankings. Moreover, the opportunities of international publications appear limited due to the characteristics of the IR/ER research which frequently has a qualitative approach and a focus on the Australian context. Overseas (especially American) journals are often heavily quantitative, moreso in the “management” fields that universities are often trying to push IR/ER researchers into, not least because of the now low representation of IR/ER journals in the top ranks.

The data also indicate the respondents will switch from Australian journals to publication in overseas journals. This is likely to disadvantage B ranked Australian journals (such as *Labour and Industry* and *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*) and be highly threatening to C-ranked Australian journals. Such C journals include the *International Journal of Employment Studies*, *Employment Relations Record* and the *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, which was given a higher (B) rank both by AIRAANZ and in the draft ERA rankings and is based at the internationally recognized National Institute of Labour Studies, as well as important local journals in related fields such as *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety Australia and New Zealand*. Indeed, if academics follow the incentive structures put in place by their universities (as the data indicate they are doing), then it is difficult to see some of these journals surviving, as they can be expected to suffer from an intensifying drought of submissions.

A corollary of the possible closure of these Australian-based outlets is the disappearance of much Australian-based policy-relevant research into employment and industrial relations. Overall, approximately half of all journals are ranked C and this gives an indication of the possible magnitude of the drop in Australian-based research. Overseas-based, B or A journals are frequently not interested in Australian research, especially that which is very specific to the sometimes unique circumstances of Australia. Yet it is often the unique aspects of Australian policy and practice, which *cannot* be understood from overseas studies, that Australian policy makers (and practitioners) are interested in. It is doubtful, then, that this was the intended outcome.

If this field is also sometimes criticized because of “politically oriented” positioning, the respondents remind us of the importance of studies in this area especially for public policy and the progress of Australian institutions. They regret the negative consequences that the ERA ranking could have for the future of the IR/ER attractiveness and evolution. It also seems important to underline the fact that the respondents regret

the way that university decision-makers are using the ERA rankings. Indeed, they blame the universities for not considering the balance between the various tasks that comprise their function and underline, especially, the lack of recognition of teaching, programs, administration and professional development tasks.

Overall, we can conclude that the ERA journal ranking system is strongly and negatively affecting the IR/ER field and could lead to the diminution of the number of Australian journals and researchers, and the amount of Australian research, in this field. Such consequences would likely be harmful for social progress in Australia. As Kaufman (2004:631) argues,

industrial relations *must* have a future because real life capitalism cannot survive without it. This lesson had to be learned the hard way in the first age of globalization a century ago; it is hoped that it will not have to be re-learned the same way during the second age of globalization we are passing through now.

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APPENDIX A: RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Table16 : Respondents' demographic characteristics

Sex of respondents	
Male	46.3
Female	53.7
Age of respondents	
20-30	4.2
31-40	17.7
41-50	31.3
51-60	34.4
More	12.5

Table 17 : Respondents' career information (%)

Tenure in the university sector	
1- 3 years	8.3
4-5 years	6.3
6-10 years	21.9
11-20 years	35.4
More	28.1
Current position (multiple responses available)	
PHD or MPhil Student	12.0
Casual Lecturer	5.9
Associate Lecturer	0.0
Lecturer	14.0
Senior Lecturer	29.0
Associate Professor	18.0
Professor	15.0
Emeritus Professor	2.0
Head of Department	2.0
Head of School	2.0
Director	2.0
Other	8.0
Tenure in current position	
Less than 1year	14.0
1- 3 years	21.5
4-5 years	20.4
6-10 years	24.7
11-20 years	16.1
More	3.2

Decision making positions occupied in the last 3 years	
Head of Department/School	15.1
Dean, or Deputy/Assoc. Dean or equivalent	11.3
Member of a promotion committee	15.1
Member of a selection committee	37.7
Member of a committee allocating university research grants	18.9
Member of a committee allocating ARC or other competitive grant program	1.9