

FROM THE EDITORS

YOUR MANUSCRIPT'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE *AMJ* REVIEW PROCESS

We think of them often as we nurture them with great care and concern. We worry about them constantly and wonder if their potential is being reached. Often, we ask trusted others to give their opinions about how we can help them become better and stronger. Although it is difficult, we recognize that at some point, we have to let them go so they can stand as a necessary first step to surviving and then thriving on their own without us. We know that they'll always be an important part of us; but we also know that they must establish their own identities as well. Sometimes, the separation between us and them creates a sense of loneliness and even discomfort for a while. Helping us to overcome the loss we feel is the knowledge that there are others to whom we want to continuously provide the same level of nurturing, care, and concern. So, with joy in our hearts as we watch them make their own way, we move on.

These words may cause some of us to think of one or all of our children or others about whom we care deeply. If this is the case for you, I imagine that a smile will cross your face as you recall cherished moments with those you love and with those who bring much joy to your life. I know this is the case for me as I recall cherished moments with my daughter, son, and grandson, as well as other members of our family.

My thought for your consideration is that many of us have similar feelings about and reactions to the manuscripts with which we are involved! In this sense, isn't it the case that we think often about our papers as we seek to nurture and guide them, expressing great concern about their well-being while doing so? And, don't we worry about each paper once we submit it to a journal to be considered for publication? Isn't there a bit of anxiety associated with the separation between us and a paper when we send it off to a journal so it can experience the process of review by other scholars?

It seems to me that many of us have these feelings about our papers because we want each one to reach its potential. For work published in *AMJ*, we typically conclude that a paper is making important strides toward reaching its potential when first reviewers and an editor and then the broader academic community conclude that the work makes a significant theoretical contribution and a signifi-

cant empirical contribution. Influencing future scholarship in the research domain in which a paper's research question is embedded is another indicator of reaching potential, as are being widely cited and contributing to *AMJ*'s impact factor score as a result of earning a high citation count.

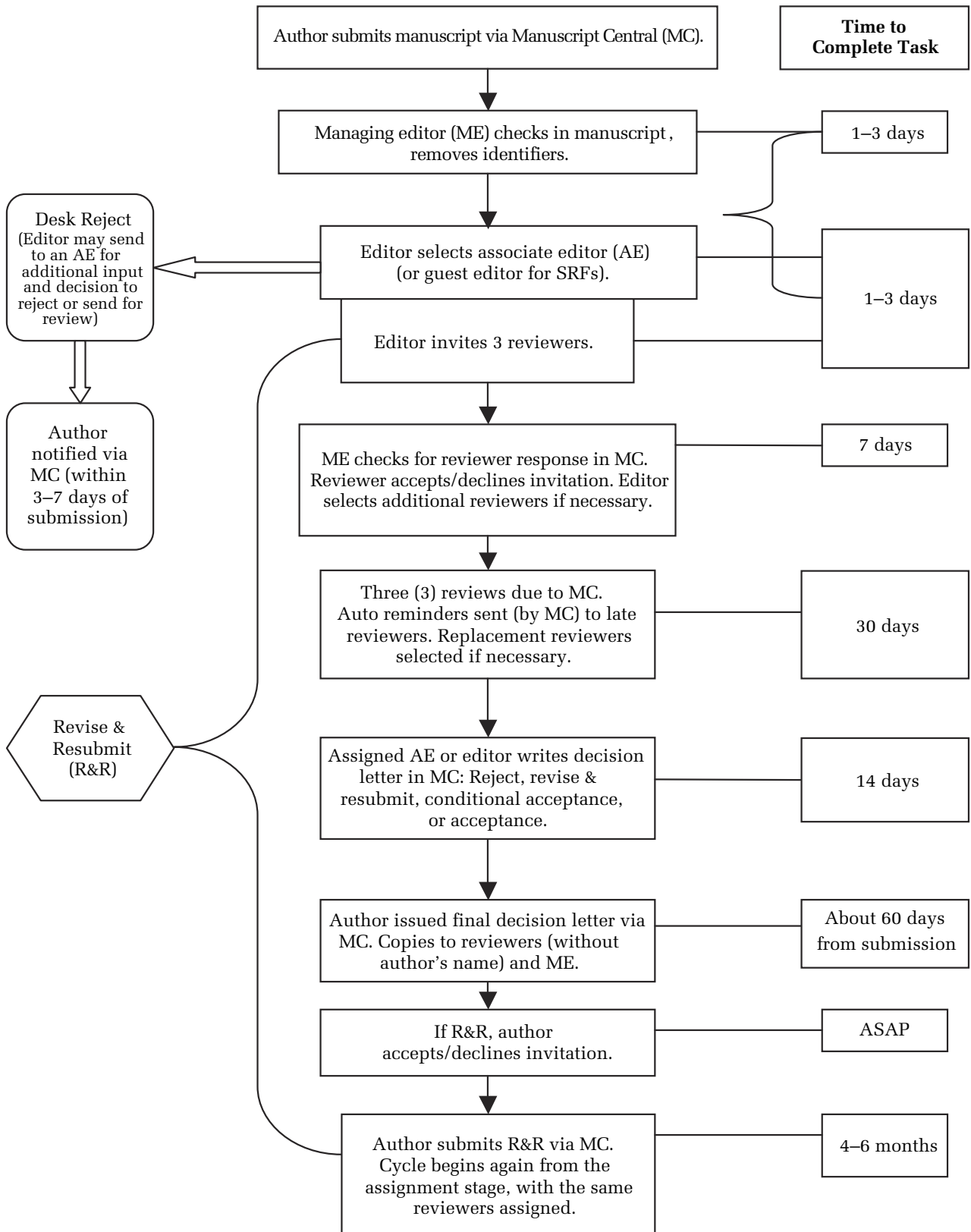
The purpose of these introductory remarks is to say that when we on the *AMJ* editorial team receive a manuscript from you, we understand the breadth and depth of the commitment you have made to a research project and to the paper resulting from designing and completing that project. We know that you have nurtured the project and that you care deeply about it. Additionally, we recognize that when we receive your paper, you are indeed expressing a desire for others to seriously consider the work's potential to contribute to a research literature, to *AMJ*, and in a broad sense, to the global academic community.

Additionally, we do indeed respect and greatly value your decision to send your paper to *AMJ* for publication consideration. We know that other journals compete with us for your high-quality empirical work. Accordingly, we want to be excellent stewards of your paper once we receive it. In this regard, I'd like to say that your editorial team (the associate editors, the editorial review board members, the ad hoc reviewers, the managing editor, the copy and production editor, and the editor) is committed to doing everything possible to provide you with a timely, developmental and constructive reviewing experience. (Of course, your current editorial team's commitment mirrors the one expressed by previous *AMJ* editorial teams.) Given this commitment, the question at hand becomes, What process is the current editorial team using to provide authors/scholars with timely, developmental, and constructive reviews? Answering this question is the purpose of the remaining parts of this commentary.

A Schematic of *AMJ*'s Review Process

Figure 1 is a schematic of *AMJ*'s review process, showing both the individual tasks that comprise the process and amounts of time. The amount of time shown for each task is a guideline. Our intention is to complete each task within the specified

FIGURE 1
AMJ's Review Process



amount of time. As you will see toward the bottom of the figure in the right column, our desire is to provide a decision letter to you within 60 days. In some instances, you will receive the decision letter in fewer than 60 days. Unfortunately, in some instances more than 60 days will pass before you receive a decision letter. In all instances though, we try very hard to meet our internally generated expectations regarding task completion times. I'll now turn to the parts of Figure 1 to describe the review process.

Receiving and Acknowledging Your Manuscript

AMJ uses a fully electronic system to complete the review process. By submitting your paper to Manuscript Central (MC), you initialize this process (guidelines regarding the submission of papers appear in each issue of *AMJ* and on *AMJ*'s website at http://journals.aomonline.org/amj/contributor_information.html). As described in the guidelines, papers are to meet certain presentation or style standards in order to be considered for review. (The style guidelines are available for review at http://journals.aomline.org/amj/style_guide.html). Within one to three days, *AMJ*'s managing editor verifies that a manuscript satisfies these expectations. Those failing to do so are returned to the author(s) with descriptions of adjustments to be made to the paper so it can satisfy the guidelines associated with this initial step of the review process. Removing identifiers that make the author(s) visible to others is another aspect of this step. As we know, advancing technologies increase the difficulty we face in doing this; however, we remain vigilant in our efforts.

Once the managing editor has completed her/his work, a paper is placed into the editor's queue in the MC system. MC generates an automatic e-mail message for the editor signaling that a paper awaits attention.

Editorial Selections and Inputs

After receiving a message from MC, as editor my first task is to examine the submitted paper to decide if it should be entered into the review process. The degree to which the paper appears to have a reasonable probability of satisfactorily addressing the components of *AMJ*'s editorial mission is the primary decision criterion in this instance. In this context, papers that do not include empirical tests; those lacking an effort to test, build, or develop theory; and those failing to test important relationships are candidates for *desk reject* decision letters. As editor, I write the vast majority of these letters. However, for papers with topics that are clearly outside my areas of expertise, I ask one of the

associate editors to verify that a desk reject decision is appropriate. If this verification is forthcoming, I also ask the associate editor to write the letter. Our goal is to send these letters within seven days of a paper's being submitted to us.

After determining that a paper should be reviewed, my task is to assign it to an associate editor or to myself. Matching submission content with research expertise and a commitment to balancing the workload among the associate editors are the criteria I apply to this task. Simultaneously, using the MC system I select three reviewers for the paper in question.

I use three sorts for selecting reviewers. I do this to fulfill my desire to choose one person with an interest in the general research domain (e.g., human resource management practices or corporate diversification), one person with an interest in the more detailed nature of the work's research question (e.g., an analysis of an aspect of international HRM practices or an examination of unrelated diversification strategies), and one individual with expertise related to the paper's methods (e.g., HLM). Obviously, it is not possible to perfectly satisfy all three sorts for each paper, although the interest in doing so remains strong.

I would be remiss if I failed to say here too that, as is true for most if not all journals, *AMJ* depends on acceptances from those we contact to review papers. Members of *AMJ*'s editorial board agree to review 12 papers per year. The truth is that a few board members handle more than 12 per year, and we are extremely grateful for their extraordinary service. The volume and diversity of papers we receive, though, mandates that we use a number of ad hoc reviewers as well. As Dave Ketchen so eloquently and creatively expressed in his recent "From the Editors" (Ketchen, 2008), members of the academic community agreeing to serve the needs of the collective body are a vital aspect of the review process. (If you have not had an opportunity to read Dave's commentary, please let me encourage you to do so. I strongly believe you will find your time well spent.) I think it is important to note here that those who submit their work to *AMJ* are expected to then agree to review for *AMJ*. This expectation is articulated in the *Journal's* "Information for Contributors." Here are the relevant statements: "Submission of a manuscript to the *Journal* also carries an implicit quid pro quo: **willingness to review for AMJ**. The cornerstone of the editorial process at *AMJ* is the willingness of colleagues to provide each other feedback through peer review. Authors who submit manuscripts to *AMJ* for review are expected to reciprocate by reviewing for *AMJ* if called upon to do so" (emphasis in original). Thus, after submitting your paper to *AMJ* for review,

please expect that you will be asked to “give back” by reviewing another scholar’s paper. It is truly vital for these requests to be accepted in that we are all members of a silent global community of scholars with a shared interest as we seek to create knowledge when publishing in *AMJ*.

As shown in Figure 1, the editorial team allocates 7 days to reviewers (board and/or ad hoc) to accept the request to review. In truth, this is a part of the review process where we can easily lose time relative to the goal of sending a decision letter to you within 60 days. The key reason for this is that rejections of requests to review a paper cause us to select another reviewer. We clearly understand that situations sometimes prevent individuals (including board members) from accepting requests to review. Nonetheless, each decline we receive triggers the need to request the services of another individual. Occasionally, we contact as many as eight or nine people to receive three acceptances. (Fortunately, this is an infrequent experience.) Yet in the spirit of full disclosure, I want to note that rather commonly, I ask five or six people per paper to gain agreements from three individuals to review a particular manuscript. Clearly, some decline a review request because the paper’s content does not sufficiently match their research expertise and interests. (I am trying hard to reduce the number of times this happens.) Overall, though, declines to our requests to review create time-related issues that concern us.

The final part of the *editorial selection and inputs* parts of *AMJ*’s review process concerns receipt of reviews. As shown in Figure 1, we allow 30 days for individuals to submit their reviews, using MC to do so. Occasionally, reviewers find it necessary to request additional time to complete their work. We accommodate these requests in that we believe they are made in good faith. However, this is another part of the review process where time can be lost relative to our goal of providing feedback to authors within 60 days. Because of this, we remain extremely grateful to the vast majority of our reviewers who comply with the request to provide input to us within 30 days.

Writing and Sending the Decision Letter

Receipt of all three reviews triggers a message from MC to the assigned action editor (either one of the associate editors or me). At this point, the action editor carefully reads and studies all three reviews and the paper. The action editor is responsible for making the editorial decision, writing the decision letter, and sending the letter (along with the reviews) to the author(s). A blind copy of the decision letter (along with all three reviews) is also sent to each reviewer. The reason the action editor

makes the decision and writes the letter is that the paper assignment is a function of his/her expertise and interest. Importantly, the action editor very seriously considers the reviewers’ inputs and editorial recommendations. However, the responsibility for making the editorial decision (reject, revise and resubmit, conditional acceptance, or acceptance) rests with the action editor. The associate editors and I remain very interested in providing authors with developmental and constructive reviews. Along with the reviewers, we strongly believe that an important differentiator for *AMJ* is the care and concern the full editorial team has for each paper it receives. The editorial decision letter is an avenue through which that care and concern are shown to authors and to the scholarly community. As shown in Figure 1, an action editor seeks to write the decision letter within 14 days. This is the final step in the process we use to provide a decision to authors within 60 days. Revise and resubmit and conditional acceptance decisions trigger another round of the full review process.

Concluding Comments

Previously (Ireland, 2008), I indicated that one of this editorial team’s goals is to provide authors with timely, high-quality feedback. The team and I know that your papers and the empirical work they present are precious to you and an extension of you, just as is the case with your children and/or others with whom you are close. We continue to see reaching the goal related to the type of feedback you receive from us as instrumental to our desire for *AMJ* to be the empirical journal of first choice for scholars throughout the global community. The process used to review your paper is critical to our efforts to signal to you that we care deeply about your manuscript. We want the “journey” your paper experiences to be professional, constructive, timely, and transparent. Our commitment to you is to accord your paper the respect it deserves. Thank you for the privilege of receiving empirical management research in which you have a deep interest and to which you have given much of yourself.

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