

FROM THE EDITORS

Everything You've Always Wanted to Know about *AMJ* (But May Have Been Afraid to Ask)

As our editorial team completes its first year of receiving manuscripts, we believe it would be helpful to reflect upon and share answers to the most frequently asked questions regarding publication goals and processes at *AMJ*. During the recent Academy meetings in Honolulu, we individually participated in many symposia and consortia focusing on publication policies at *AMJ* and other journals. In comparing notes, we realized that there is considerable overlap among the questions asked and explored during these various sessions. In addition, we realized that we have made a number of recent changes to *Journal* policies and operations that are not yet widely recognized. As such, it seems a good time to touch base with readers, reviewers, and both published and prospective authors about *AMJ*'s mission, aspirations, policies, and operations. We begin by reiterating *AMJ*'s mission, from which most of our other policies and practices flow.

What Is *AMJ*'s Mission?

AMJ's mission, updated in 2004, is this: "to publish empirical research that tests, extends, or builds management theory and contributes to management practice. All empirical methods—including, but not limited to, qualitative, quantitative, field, laboratory, and combination methods—are welcome. To be published in *AMJ*, a manuscript *must make strong empirical and theoretical contributions and highlight the significance of those contributions to the management field*. Thus, preference is given to submissions that test, extend, or build strong theoretical frameworks while empirically examining issues with high importance for management theory and practice. *AMJ* is not tied to any particular discipline, level of analysis, or national context."

Is *AMJ* a "Micro" Journal, a "Macro" Journal, or Both?

AMJ is clearly micro *and* macro in both mission and content. As a "big tent" journal with readers spanning multiple areas of management, we are committed to publishing articles with a broad range

of appeal and impact. Furthermore, we seek to publish articles in the domain of every division inside the Academy of Management.

Given this commitment, we have undertaken a number of investigations to see if there has been systematic bias in our publications in any direction. Rynes's (2005) "From the Editors" column revealed that in 2002–04, approximately half the articles published were micro and the other half macro (as assessed via levels of analysis). A similar analysis by Marshall Schminke and Marie Mitchell (2003) covering earlier (but much longer) periods of time produced a similar result. In addition, Kirkman and Law's (2005) review of the last 35 years of international management research published in *AMJ* showed that about half the articles fell into the micro category (i.e., organizational behavior or human resources) while the other half were macro (i.e., strategy and organization theory). Overall, the main message is that the content areas sought and published by *AMJ* are very broad and of interest to a wide number of disciplines and scholars.

What Are the Criteria for Publishing Articles in *AMJ*? What Are the Major Causes of Rejection?

AMJ aspires to be the "journal of choice" for the best empirical work examining multiple areas of management. As a major journal with high impact ratings, our standards for publication are high. Moreover, as our mission statement indicates, our criteria for publication don't stop with an emphasis on empirical contributions alone. Rather, *AMJ* has three pillars by which a manuscript is assessed: *theoretical contribution*, *empirical contribution*, and *contribution to practice*.

In an earlier "From the Editors" column, Rynes (2002) empirically analyzed the major reasons for negative decisions during the *AMJ* review process. She found that in nearly five of six rejections, perceptions of *low contribution* were either the first- or second-mentioned factor in negative decision letters. So, what are the characteristics of papers that do not meet the contribution hurdle?

Articles may fail to meet the standard for a *strong empirical contribution* for a variety of reasons. One common problem involves the use of *operational*

measures that are not properly validated, or that do not appear to capture the constructs developed in the theoretical section of the paper (i.e., construct validity problems). Another involves the use of *inadequate research designs* for testing the question at hand (e.g., designs with ambiguous/reverse causality, serious omitted-variable biases, or common method and source variance). In other cases, the *importance of the question* or the size of the *incremental contribution* over previously published research may be in question, particularly if the topic is a very narrow one.

AMJ's criterion for a *strong theoretical contribution* means that authors must consider how their work contributes to theory and explicitly frame this contribution for their readers. Meaningful new insights or implications for theory must be present in each manuscript that is published in *AMJ*, although authors can develop these insights in many ways, including falsification of conventional understanding, theory building through inductive or qualitative research, first empirical testing of a theory, meta-analysis with theoretical implications, and constructive replication that clarifies the boundaries or range of a theory.

Because most manuscripts submitted to *AMJ* contain hypotheses (qualitative research is often an exception), authors must be careful when building the theoretical logic in their hypothesis development. What is often missing in submitted papers is the specification of the *underlying theoretical mechanism or logic* that explains the relationships among a set of variables. For example, one common mistake is to simply list previous empirical findings in an attempt to justify hypothetical links. Such a manuscript will fall short of the theoretical contribution needed at *AMJ* because the absence of theoretical logic, by definition, will preclude a sufficient theoretical contribution or advancement of theory. We recommend that prospective authors consult a very helpful article by Sutton and Staw (1995) that discusses the most common mistakes made when crafting theoretical arguments. In addition, doing a "self-check" of your intended theoretical contribution and obtaining a friendly (but critical!) peer review of your manuscript prior to submission can be extremely valuable in clearing this hurdle. If you believe that the nature of your theoretical contribution is somewhat "out of the ordinary" (e.g., perhaps it derives from further analysis of surprising results rather than from a priori theorizing), please draw this fact to the editor's attention at the time of submission.

Finally, *AMJ* articles must highlight the significance of their empirical and theoretical *contributions for practice*. For example, what should a man-

ager do differently in his or her organization after reading your manuscript? While practical relevance need not be direct or immediate in all cases, authors should discuss the potential implications of their work for present or future managers. If you cannot imagine a manager *ever* caring about your work, even after further development (by yourself or other scholars), your manuscript might not satisfy this criterion.

What Are Some General Strategies for Avoiding Rejection at *AMJ* (and Other Journals as Well)?

It is important to realize that the types of difficulties mentioned above often arise during the earliest phases of research design. Thus, we strongly suggest *peer review of your research question, design, and measures prior to data collection*, since responding to reviewers' concerns about these three central features is usually difficult (or impossible) after the fact. While authors using archival data may have an easier time responding to such requests, one can't always count on additional or alternative data being available. For these reasons, it is important to make sure that you have designed the best study possible prior to execution. One source that we have found to be particularly helpful in designing research projects from start to finish is Anne Huff's (1998) book, *Writing for Scholarly Publication*.

In addition to avoiding "fatal flaws" in research design, authors greatly increase their chances of eventual success by submitting manuscripts that are *clearly written, novel, and interesting*. Because clear writing goes hand-in-hand with clear thinking (Huff, 1998), it is important to put your thoughts on paper early in the research process, modifying them as you go and as new ideas develop. As mentioned above, sending your paper out for friendly reviews can improve the presentation of your ideas. If a friendly reviewer does not understand something about your paper, chances are the anonymous *AMJ* reviewers won't either.

There are several sources to consult in order to learn more about how reviews proceed, both at *AMJ* and more widely. One good general source is *Publishing in the Organizational Sciences*, volumes 1 and 2 (Cumplings & Frost, 1985, 1995). Another, more specific source is the inside cover of the journal of interest to you or, increasingly, its Web page. For example, in order to see how your work is likely to be evaluated by *AMJ* reviewers, you might take a look at our "Reviewer Guidelines" (http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/reviewer_guidelines.html) or our "Information for Contributors" (http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/contributor_information.html),

which also includes a link to our “Manuscript Evaluation Form.” “Information for Contributors” also appears near the front of every print issue of *AMJ*.

Finally, to see what a “really good *AMJ* paper” looks like, please see the list of our Best Article Award winners, also on our Web site (<http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/awards.html>), and *in this issue* (p. 739), which announces the winner and runners-up for the best *AMJ* article published in 2004. These award-winning works can be used as exemplars for various types of methodologies and content areas and may be particularly useful to international authors who may be less familiar with the look and feel of an *AMJ* paper.

How Many Manuscripts Are Submitted to *AMJ* Annually?

Currently, *AMJ* is receiving 800–900 new submissions per year, as well as 200–300 revisions of prior submissions. In some years, we also have submissions to special research forums (SRFs). For example, during the past year we received 84 new submissions to the Special Research Forum on Managing Exploration and Exploitation.

To deal with this high volume, the new editorial team is significantly larger than the previous team was, containing eight members as opposed to five. In addition, we have also expanded the size of the editorial review board by approximately 20 members. Finally, we have shifted our emphasis somewhat to focus a bit less on the least promising papers, leaving more time to develop the most promising ones (see the next section).

Are All Manuscripts Submitted to *AMJ* Sent Out for Review?

No. In some cases, submitted manuscripts do not fit with the mission of *AMJ* or are sufficiently weak that they are almost certain to be rejected in a full review process. Either the editor or an associate editor who is an expert in the manuscript’s subject matter directly rejects such manuscripts. These are “desk rejections.” Last year, approximately 30 percent of submissions to *AMJ* received desk rejections—a rate that is similar to those of other top-tier management and organizational science journals. Desk rejections of weak or poorly fitting manuscripts allow us to concentrate more heavily on those manuscripts showing the greatest promise for eventual publication in *AMJ*. They also prevent us from overutilizing the valuable resources of our editorial board members and ad hoc reviewers. Although we do not provide the full review process to manuscripts that fit *AMJ*’s mission poorly, we nev-

ertheless attempt to give at least limited developmental feedback to the authors in the hope of improving the match between future submissions and *AMJ*’s mission.

What Is the Acceptance Rate at *AMJ*?

Over the past year, approximately 16 percent of initial submissions received invitations for revision and resubmission. On the basis of past statistics for conversion of resubmitted manuscripts, we anticipate an acceptance rate of approximately 8 percent. Although this figure is quite consistent with *AMJ*’s acceptance rate in other recent years, it does *not* reflect a “goal” or “target” for the *AMJ* editorial team. Instead, this rate has occurred rather “naturally” and is closely paralleled in most of our SRFs as well (e.g., “Managing Exploration and Exploitation” is also on track to have an approximate 8 percent acceptance rate). It is important to note that if submissions continue to increase, we will simply *publish more papers* rather than decrease the acceptance rate.

Prospective authors should understand that despite our high rejection rate, the focus of *AMJ*’s editorial work is on acceptance, not rejection. Publication is our *raison d’être*. In this very fundamental sense, our goals are in perfect “sync” with those of submitting authors: we, too, must publish, or we will perish! However, as with authors, our reputation and impact depend on the quality and significance of the work we publish. As such, our review process focuses heavily on “polishing the gems” in submitted work, particularly those papers showing the most promise at initial submission.

What Is the Turnaround Time at *AMJ*?

Our overall average response time at *AMJ* for the past year (from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005) was *48 days*. However, turnaround times averaged *5 days* for desk-rejected manuscripts and *72 days* for fully reviewed articles.

What Happens When a Manuscript Comes in to *AMJ*?

AMJ submissions that are not desk rejected are typically read by five individuals: the editor, an associate editor, and three reviewers. *Associate editors (AEs)* are assigned by the editor, who matches editorial expertise and the content area of a manuscript. Once assigned to a manuscript, an associate editor has *sole authority* to make publication decisions concerning that manuscript. In strategic terms, we operate much like a multidivisional firm:

we have a CEO (the editor), but each AE acts as the head of an individual business unit with full authority over assigned manuscripts. In this way, we try to craft a careful balance between having a cohesive team that is well aligned with our “corporate” mission and goals, while at the same time pushing decision-making authority down to those with the closest knowledge of a particular subject area. The editorial team is in constant communication in order to maintain shared overarching goals in the face of diverse subject matter, as befits our broad representation of management subareas.

Reviewers are matched to manuscripts on the basis of their expertise. Reviewers may be editorial review board members, past ad hoc reviewers, or new reviewers. Information about reviewer expertise comes from several sources. First, we have a computerized database of thousands of board members and ad hoc reviewers, organized by their areas of expertise. This expertise-based database is supplemented by a reviewer-based file containing hundreds of reviewer profiles (i.e., personal Web pages, curricula vitae, or publication records). Both these files are consulted in making appropriate reviewer-to-manuscript matches. However, in cases where the editor does not have sufficient information to make appropriate matches, the manuscript is circulated to the AEs closest to the topic for suggestions.

Who Makes the Final Decision on a Manuscript?

The *action editor* (either the editor or the assigned associate editor) makes the final decision on a manuscript. Both the editor and the associate editors take a very hands-on role in the publication process. Specifically, we do not simply tally the reviewers' ratings and then side with the majority of the reviewers; that is, reviewer recommendations are not “votes.” Rather, we take advantage of our bird's-eye view of an entire manuscript and its context (e.g., tendencies toward reviewer lenience or stringency) that may cause us to see things differently from one or more of the individual reviewers. This may mean that in a few cases a paper that receives somewhat positive reviews might be rejected, while a paper that is seen more negatively by reviewers might receive an opportunity to revise and resubmit. In this sense, reviewers' observations and recommendations inform, but do not dictate, the action editor's decision.

Because *AMJ* gives strong authority to the associate editors, it is important for readers to know that most of our AEs have been “promoted” from the ranks of the *AMJ* editorial review board. By using primarily internal promotions, we ensure that our AEs have considerable reviewing experi-

ence as well as impressive quality and timeliness statistics as reviewers. Indeed, most of the current members of the associate editor team are past recipients of *AMJ*'s prestigious Best Reviewer Award. Moreover, because *AMJ* is a broad, multidisciplinary journal, the AEs selected by each editor are drawn from a fairly heterogeneous group when one considers the number and diversity of scholars who have been on the editorial review board at one time or another.

Having a strong action editor role is particularly important (and, we think, advantageous) because our reviewer assignment process can result in varied opinions of the same manuscript. To some extent, a potential lack of interrater reliability is built into our selection process: that is, reviewers with different types of expertise are called upon to address different aspects of a manuscript. For example, if a submitted manuscript studies executive succession using hazard rate/survival analyses, our reviewer assignments might include a researcher in executive succession, a strategy researcher with expertise in event history analyses, and a third reviewer with a background in either corporate governance or strategic human resources. In making these assignments, we are looking for a diverse set of perspectives on each manuscript, as is consistent with our broad readership and mission. As such, differences among reviewers are often to be expected and should not be regarded as “error” in assessing the quality of the review process (cf. Starbuck, 2005).

Given that our mission is to publish high-impact work, we often have to think creatively and fight for interesting and novel papers with promise. This goal necessitates strong action editors who are willing to disagree with reviewers, who often feel that their major role is to point out the “flaws” in manuscripts. Given our meritocratic process for selecting AEs, we believe that giving high levels of discretion to them results in the best and most creative decisions. Thus, you can disagree with reviewers—and even the action editor—and still get a paper accepted, so long as your arguments are evidence-based and convincing.

After a Paper Has Received Official Acceptance at *AMJ*, How Long Will It Take for It to Appear in Print?

Current lead times for publishing papers in *AMJ* are running about 12 months. In the meantime, your accepted paper will be posted on *AMJ*'s Web site. Approximately four months prior to publication, your manuscript will be copy-edited by our production manager, who will

likely have suggestions for improving clarity and presentation and meeting *AMJ*'s stylistic conventions. You will have an opportunity to review the copy-edited version and then to see a close-to-final proof of your manuscript, on which you can make final, small changes.

How Do You Become a (New) Reviewer for *AMJ*? How Do You Become a Member of the Editorial Board?

First-time reviewers come to our attention in a number of ways: They may be cited in submitted manuscripts, recommended by a current member of the *AMJ* board or another senior scholar, or self-nominated. New reviewers are generally asked to submit a curriculum vitae and to fill out a "reviewer preferences form." When a new reviewer is assigned, he or she is generally paired with two experienced reviewers, and the action editor is alerted that a first-time reviewer is involved.

In selecting, retaining, and promoting reviewers, we first and foremost seek people who embody our vision of the review process: to provide high-quality, developmental reviews in a timely fashion (four weeks or less). Every time we receive a review, the action editor rates its quality and records its timeliness. Subsequent decisions about ad hoc reviewers, as well as editorial review board selections, are based almost exclusively on this database. In this way, *AMJ* operates quite differently from some other journals in that we strive to be an almost perfect meritocracy with respect to reviewer quality. (One limited exception is that on occasion, senior scholars are added in particular areas that are underrepresented relative to current manuscript flows, or in areas where we would like to encourage additional submissions but do not currently have the necessary expertise on the review board.)

Although you will see many well-known scholars identified when you read over the list of *AMJ* board members, you may also see some names you don't recognize. This is because, first, we have reviewers from a wide variety of disciplines and areas and second, because reviewers do not have to have published in *AMJ* to serve on our board. Rather, reviewers need only meet our commitment to providing high-quality, developmental, and timely feedback. We believe that most of the prestige of the *Journal* comes from the high quality of our reviews as well as from the high quality of the resultant published work, rather than from the "high-power" names on the board.

Do *AMJ* Articles Have Page Limits? Do You Still Publish Research Notes?

Research notes and strict manuscript page limits in *AMJ* are great examples of path dependency: they had a purpose earlier in the *Journal*'s history, but as time went on it became less clear why the distinction was made between articles and research notes or why specific page limits were assigned to each. Today, *AMJ*'s editors and reviewers are much more concerned with an article's contribution-to-length ratio than with categorizing it.

With that said, we realize that authors often like to have some sense of what is considered a typical length for a given journal. For *AMJ*, an "average" paper is approximately 40 pages, double-spaced throughout. However, we recognize that for some endeavors, especially for qualitative research and manuscripts based on multiple studies, authors will need more than 40 pages to adequately convey their theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. Similarly, authors with less ambitious theoretical and empirical contributions would be well advised to submit shorter papers so that the contribution-to-length ratio does not become too small. Here again, critical self- and peer review prior to submission can be most useful.

How Important Are *AMJ*'s Style Guidelines?

The "Style Guide for Authors" appears on the Web at http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/style_guide.html and in several print issues of *AMJ* annually. We take our style guidelines seriously at *AMJ*. Guidelines for format, writing style, and bibliographies are norms in professional publishing. Every publication has a style—a distinctive, internally consistent look. Without style guidelines, *AMJ* would not be a *journal*, but a random collection of papers. Consistent style and format help reviewers and, ultimately, subscribers, focus on the *content* of your work because every element is in a predictable place. Sending a paper to *AMJ* using another journal's style may indicate a lack of attention to detail or apathy about your submission. In some cases, papers are returned for reformatting prior to review. In the competitive world of publishing academic papers, following guidelines for submission is one thing over which you have complete control. Since formatting is one of the first things reviewers see, using *AMJ*'s style guidelines will ensure that you do not unnecessarily create a negative first impression with your action editor and reviewers.

Does *AMJ* Welcome Qualitative Research?

Absolutely! While qualitative research is not new to *AMJ* (e.g., at least five of *AMJ*'s Best Article Award winners have been based on qualitative methods), the current editorial team has undertaken a variety of efforts to ensure that qualitative researchers feel welcome at *AMJ*. First, we have increased the number of editorial board members with expertise in and a commitment to qualitative research. Second, we have removed manuscript page limits to better accommodate extensive, high-quality qualitative research (although it should be noted that previous boards made length exceptions for qualitative research as well). Third, we have revised our mission statement to make it clear that *AMJ* seeks inductive, *theory-building* research in addition to theory testing and other forms of empirical research. Finally, we have discussed these changes with our editorial board members so that prospective submitters of qualitative research need not fear that the editor or reviewers will be biased against their work.

Does *AMJ* Welcome Meta-Analyses? How about Replications?

AMJ welcomes both meta-analyses and replications, so long as they make theoretical contributions (Eden, 2002). At the same time, it is probably fair to acknowledge that we probably do not accept as many replications as do journals whose focus is on a narrower subset of management-related issues.

What Are the Advantages of *AMJ*'s Forthcoming Web-Based Submission Process?

By the time you read this, we may already have switched to Web-based submission using Scholar One's Manuscript Central. This move will provide a number of advantages, including greater database security, automatic reminders of overdue reviews (which will further shorten turnaround times), and greater ability to decentralize the reviewer assignment process by delegating it to associate editors while still maintaining centralized records and co-

ordination. In addition, we will take advantage of the transition to revise our reviewer preference and manuscript keyword codes to incorporate greater topic specificity and new research areas. Watch for an announcement of this move on our Web site.

In Conclusion

We hope that the preceding questions and answers are useful in highlighting current operating procedures and recent changes at *AMJ*. As always, we look forward to receiving your comments—and your submissions!

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IN MEMORIAM

It was with great sadness that we learned that Professor Bjørn Løvås, the coauthor of the article "Knowledge Sharing in Organizations: Multiple Networks, Multiple Phases," in this issue of *AMJ*, was tragically killed in a mountaineering accident in July 2005. Professor Løvås was scheduled to be a visiting assistant professor of strategic and international management at the MIT Sloan School of Management during the 2005–06 academic year. His coauthors, Louise Mors and Morten T. Hansen, wish to dedicate their article to the memory of Bjørn Løvås.