

## FROM THE EDITORS

### “GETTING ON BOARD” WITH *AMJ*: BALANCING QUALITY AND INNOVATION IN THE REVIEW PROCESS

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One of the most important jobs of any editorial team is ensuring the quality of the review process. As Chet Miller discussed in a recent “From the Editors” column (Miller, 2006), the existence of such realities as complexity bias (Armstrong, 1980), confirmation bias (Kuhn, 1970), limited ability to predict which papers will become highly influential (Lee, Vicente, Cassano, & Shearer, 2003), and modest interreviewer reliabilities (e.g., Peters & Ceci, 1982) raise constant challenges to the quality of the review process. In addition, the relatively low acceptance rates at top journals such as *AMJ* undoubtedly result in many disappointed—and sometimes disgruntled—authors. Given these considerations, it is of the utmost importance that we at *AMJ* do everything possible to ensure that our review process is as fair and effective as possible.

A second major challenge lies in trying to ensure that as we seek to uphold scientific standards of reliability and validity, we do not sacrifice too much in terms of innovation, variety, and risk taking. As many observers have noted, without deliberate actions to encourage openness, scientific review processes tend toward conservatism and incrementalism (e.g., Barber, 1961; Daft & Lewin, 1990; Kuhn, 1970). This conservatism can impede scientific progress by reducing review boards’ absorptive capacity, or the ability to recognize the value of new, externally generated information (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). As a former secretary general of the European Science Foundation, Enric Banda, said: “For maintaining standards, the critical peer review seems to be the best system available. At the same time, we need to develop ways and means of exploiting all the creativity in science without losing quality control” (Banda, 2001: 1).

As the total quality management movement reminds us, the quality of any organization’s outputs

is heavily influenced by its inputs and processes. In this “From the Editors” column, I discuss some of the processes related to one of *AMJ*’s major inputs—the *AMJ* editorial board.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I outline how potential *AMJ* board members are identified and selected, as well as how the performance and timeliness of *AMJ* reviewers are facilitated through goal setting, evaluation, and feedback. In addition, I talk about some of the ways in which our board selection and management processes are designed to support innovation while maintaining quality. Variety and innovation in *AMJ* publications are warranted by the diversity of the Academy itself and its diverse knowledge bases, as well as the wide variety of organizational forms and practices found in this increasingly global society (Barney, 2004; Child & McGrath, 2001).

#### Selecting for Quality: Identifying and Selecting Editorial Board Members

In his highly cited paper, “The People Make the Place,” Ben Schneider (1987) argued that although people and organizations continuously influence one another, when all is said and done, it is *people* who create the norms, routines, and outcomes of organizations. He said, “My main thesis is that the attributes of people, not the nature of the external environment, or organizational technology, or organizational structure, are the fundamental determinants of organizational behavior. . . . [My] framework proposes that organizations are functions of the kinds of people they contain” (Schneider, 1987: 437).

Of course, factors such as the environment, technology, and organizational structure undoubtedly have important influences on the behaviors and performance of organizations (including editorial boards) as well. Still, research on personnel selection has convincingly demonstrated that decisions

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<sup>1</sup> Other important inputs are the authors who submit manuscripts to *AMJ* and *AMJ*’s pool of ad hoc reviewers.

about who joins an organization are crucial to its behaviors and performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 2003). Thus, selection of a journal's editorial board is one very important leverage point for building, maintaining, and enhancing journal quality. With this in mind, how are *AMJ* board members selected?

*AMJ* receives more than 800 new manuscripts each year (in addition to 200+ revised manuscripts), with each manuscript typically receiving three double-blind reviews.<sup>2</sup> As such, between 2,000 and 3,000 scholars review manuscripts for *AMJ* during each editor's term, becoming part of *AMJ*'s ad hoc reviewer panel. This panel, like the Academy of Management itself, consists of individuals who are highly diverse in terms of areas of expertise, geographic location, epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and professional experience. However, it is certainly the case that the more prolific and highly cited a scholar is, the more likely he or she is to come to an editor's attention and be invited to provide an ad hoc review. Thus, *AMJ*'s reviewer pool, although very diverse, is nevertheless weighted toward individuals with strong track records of publication and citations.

The idea that individuals who serve as board members or editorial gatekeepers should be scholars with recognized expertise is a widely accepted scientific norm (Banda, 2001; Merton, 1973). Thus, individuals with strong publication and citation records are the most obvious candidates to receive board invitations. However, not all widely published and highly cited ad hoc reviewers are asked to become *AMJ* board members. In order to be invited to join the board, a reviewer must also demonstrate the ability and willingness to provide high-quality reviews in a timely fashion. How are ability and willingness determined in this context?

Meta-analytic research has shown that the single best selection technique for predicting posthire job performance is the work sample (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Work samples have higher correlations with subsequent performance than cognitive ability tests, personality inventories, structured or unstructured interviews, reference checks, years of experience, or age (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998: 265).

Following these findings, *AMJ* uses evaluations of multiple "work samples"—i.e., ad hoc reviews—to select editorial board members from the broader panel of ad hoc reviewers. Specifically, we

usually obtain six to eight work samples prior to extending an invitation to join the board. Since the mid 1980s, each *AMJ* review has been rated by an action editor on both the timeliness and the quality of the comments provided.<sup>3</sup> Because scholars' careers depend on receiving timely as well as high-quality reviews, we want to ensure that *AMJ*'s board members write not only good reviews, but also timely ones. By using multiple work samples and selecting as board members only those individuals who consistently meet our timeliness and quality standards, we simultaneously build both quality and speed into the review process.

As a result of these procedures, *AMJ* has a board that is very accomplished in scholarly terms. For example, according to publications listed in the Institute for Scientific Analyses' Web of Science (Thomson Scientific), *AMJ*'s board members have authored or coauthored an average of 21.8 publications (s.d. = 18.3), or an average of 1.5 publications per year (s.d. = 0.95). Moreover, they are very prompt as reviewers, averaging only 30.7 days per review.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, one could argue that what really counts is the quality of the articles published rather than the quality of reviews—a point with which we agree. Unfortunately, we do not have a direct way of linking reviewer quality ratings with the quality of our published articles. However, we can look more generally at whether *AMJ*'s influence as a journal has been increasing or decreasing over time. In this regard, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, and Podsakoff (2005) reported the following:

It is difficult to get a clear picture of the relative influence of management journals because previous studies have focused on a single sub-area in the field over a relatively restricted number of years, and/or have used inconsistent criteria to judge journal influence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine journal influence using citations from 28 journals over the past two decades. The findings

<sup>3</sup> Prior to initiation of *AMJ*'s Web-based system in February 2006, review quality was rated on a five-point scale by the action editor in charge of a paper. Since February 2006, it has been measured on a three-point scale. Timeliness is measured by days under review.

<sup>4</sup> Overall, *AMJ*'s average time for processing manuscripts from July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006, was 35 days: 7 days for manuscripts for which the editor or an associate editor made decisions without soliciting peer review and 62.5 days for manuscripts going through the full review process. These quick turnaround times were achieved despite the very large number of manuscripts submitted to *AMJ* in this period (834 initial submissions and 200+ revised manuscripts).

<sup>2</sup> Double-blind review processes are ones in which neither authors nor reviewers are aware of the others' identity.

show that the top seven journals accounted for 61% of all the citations in the journals included, and that the three journals that showed the greatest increase in influence over the past 20 years were *AMJ*, *AMR*, and *SMJ* (Podsakoff et al., 2005: 473)

Similarly, a slightly earlier study covering fewer publication years and using a different methodology found *AMJ* to be the second most influential journal in a set of journals including *Strategic Management Journal* (which came in first), the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Decision Processes*, the *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Management* (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). As such, there is at least some independent evidence to suggest that *AMJ*'s board selection and evaluation processes are contributing to the publication of high-quality research.

### Facilitating Innovation and Variety (While Maintaining Research Quality)

It has been widely demonstrated, as noted above, that the social and political forces associated with scientific progress tend toward conservatism (Barber, 1961; Kuhn, 1970). For example, Campanario (1993) examined 316 commentaries by authors of "citation classic" papers and found that a number of them had had difficulty either conducting their research or getting it published. Among those in the latter category, "In part, the problematic papers reported innovative methods or theories, or presented new interpretations of previous data" (Campanario, 1993: 342). In addition to slowing scientific progress in general, failure to recognize new ideas can also cause individual journals to lose the ability to participate in important scholarly conversations in the future. Thus, facilitating openness to new ideas "in the face of creeping parochialism. . . requires editorial risk-taking and the inevitable publication of papers that will sink without a trace as well as the occasional highly influential paper" (Daft & Lewin, 2006: 14–15).

With this in mind, in the first month of my term as incoming editor, I conducted a survey to tap board members' views of *AMJ*'s major strengths and suggested improvements. As a result of this survey, we modified our mission statement to make it clearer that we were seeking a broader range of manuscript types than many people seemed to realize. We also reaffirmed our support for *AMJ*'s long-standing tradition of placing a strong emphasis on theoretical contribution in evaluating manuscripts (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2006), while at the same time emphasizing the broad variety of

ways in which such a contribution might be made (Rynes, 2005).

In addition, we agreed to emphasize a small set of objectives that the board deemed particularly important for facilitating innovation and continued improvement. These included maintaining the trend toward increased *internationalization* of both the authors and subject matter appearing in *AMJ* (Kirkman & Law, 2005); urging authors to address bigger or more *important* research questions (Rynes, 2005; Rynes & Shapiro, 2005); encouraging more *interesting* research and writing (Barley, 2006; Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006; Dutton & Dukerich, 2006); and helping authors of *qualitative manuscripts* to succeed in the review process (Gephart, 2004; Suddaby, 2006).

At the same time, we also implemented a change in policy that eliminated the "research note" category and strict page length requirements, moving instead to a system in which published paper length is based on size of contribution. This was done to encourage "bigger" future submissions to *AMJ*, such as multistudy and rich qualitative research. These broad objectives have been emphasized at each annual board meeting, reinforced by occasional boardwide communications, and communicated to the entire readership of *AMJ* (e.g., Rynes, 2005).

Another way in which we attempted to increase innovation and variety was through selection of our editorial board members. Just as selection procedures can help build quality into the review process, they can also be used to make sure that the diversity of a board matches the diversity of content areas, levels of analysis, methodologies, and epistemological approaches pursued by current management and organizational scholars. For example, in selecting the current board, I invited people from various divisions in roughly the same proportions they are found in the Academy as a whole. As another example, to help ensure receptivity to qualitative submissions, I increased the number of scholars on the board who predominantly use qualitative methods in their own research.

In addition, I sought to include a mix of "professional ages" (number of years since doctorate [Cole, 1983]) on the board. There are a number of reasons for this. First, although researchers with higher professional ages are likely to have the largest numbers of cumulative (i.e., life-long) publications and citations (e.g., Landes & Posner, 2000), scholars with less experience are likely to have higher *current* productivity and citation rates. For example, in a study of six disciplines (chemistry, geology, mathematics, physics, psychology, and sociology), Cole

(1979) found the relationship between age and both quantity and quality of publications (as measured by citations) to be curvilinear, rising throughout the 30s and peaking in the late 30s or early 40s. Thus, if one assumes a median age of 30 for receiving a Ph.D. in management or organization studies, a scholar is likely to be the most productive in roughly the 3rd to 15th year after receiving a doctorate.<sup>5</sup>

Second, although there are many notable individual exceptions, on average, younger scholars are more likely to be “on the frontier” of theoretical and methodological developments in a particular field (Cole, 1979, 1983). Yet as Banda said, “When one looks at the funding agencies and academies throughout Europe which act as ‘gatekeepers’ for research, they may seem at times to be rather conservative and offer little support for the younger generation of scientists. . . . The committees that take the decisions consist of experienced people of high merit which, by their very nature, means scientists from the older generation—another factor in the conventional approach to science” (2001: 1). Thus, any attempt to encourage innovation and openness to new ideas needs to incorporate both the new frontier knowledge of younger scholars and the established wisdom and long view of older ones.

Seeking to support the above ideas, we have conducted internal analyses to determine the association between professional age and both the quality and timeliness of reviews. These analyses have shown that board members with lower professional ages definitely pull their weight as *AMJ* reviewers. For example, the correlation between members’ professional age and review quality is  $-.21$  ( $p < .05$ ), and the correlation between professional age and timeliness is  $-.13$  (n.s.). Similarly, the correlation between prior publications and review quality is  $-.14$  (n.s.), and between prior publications and timeliness,  $-.15$  (n.s.).

We also found support for the value of having a mixture of ages (and nationalities) in patterns of reviewer awards. Each year, we prepare reports of board members’ timeliness and review quality so that additional recognition can be given to the “best of the best” in the form of Best Reviewers awards. This year’s nine award winners consisted of four people with 5–7 years of postdoctoral experience, three with 12–16 years, and two with more than 20 years. Three individuals were from non-North American universities and one person, now at an

**TABLE 1**  
Correlations between Experience, Prior Publications, and Review Quality and Speed at *AMJ*

Variable <sup>a</sup>	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3
1. Experience	14.4	8.1			
2. Number of publications	21.8	18.3	.67		
3. Review speed in days	30.7	13.0	-.15	-.13	
4. Review quality	4.1	0.5	-.14	-.21*	.12

<sup>a</sup> Variable 1 was measured as years since doctorate, and variable 2 came from the ISI Web of Science.

\*  $p < .05$

American university, was born in Asia. This diversity of award-winning reviewers is also consistent with what we have observed in best reviewer awards for other journals (e.g., *AMR*) and various divisions of the Academy. For example, award-winning reviewers for this past year in the Business Policy and Strategy Division displayed the following professional age distribution: graduate student,  $n = 17$ ; 0–2 years postdoctorate,  $n = 7$ ; 2–6 years,  $n = 10$ ; 7–11 years,  $n = 8$ ; 12+ years,  $n = 5$ ; and unknown experience,  $n = 3$ .

As with review quality, we realize that desired journal outcomes do not necessarily flow merely from board selection and management processes. Still, we have some internal evidence that our board selection procedures, our initial board survey, and the subsequent changes in mission and vision have affected the nature of research being published in *AMJ*. For example, the proportion of qualitative studies published in *AMJ* rose from 5.5 percent in 2004 to 9 percent in 2005 and 15 percent in 2006. We believe that this increase in qualitative research is also likely to spill over to our goal of producing both more important, and more interesting, research. For example, Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland (2005) found that a disproportionate number of studies rated as “highly interesting” were qualitative. In addition, the two papers that tied for the *AMJ* Best Article Award in 2005 both used qualitative methods (Ferlie, Fitzgerald, Wood, & Hawkins, 2005; Gilbert, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

We believe that *AMJ*’s long-standing procedures for selecting and interacting with board members (and to a lesser extent, ad hoc reviewers) have helped build its reputation as one of the premier journals in the management and organizations field (e.g., Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992; Glick, McKelvey, Cooper, Huber, & Zmud, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> The average professional age of *AMJ* board members is 14.4 years.

Indeed, the most recent analyses of journal reputation show that *AMJ* has been one of the biggest gainers in reputation and network centrality over the past 15–20 years (Podsakoff et al., 2005; Tahai & Meyer, 1999). For this, we must thank *AMJ*'s board members, ad hoc reviewers, and those authors who submit their best work to *AMJ*. As Schneider (1987) argued, the people do make the place! Thanks to all of you.

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