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FROM THE EDITORS

Publishing across Borders: Furthering the Internationalization of *AMJ*

All recent Academy of Management presidents have committed the organization to building stronger, more meaningful relationships with the international community of management scholars and practitioners. For the *Academy of Management Journal,* that means "attracting the participation of authors, reviewers, and editors of all backgrounds and persuasions from anywhere high-quality management research is being done" (Barkema, 2001: 615).

An examination of *AMJ*'s recent publication history shows that we have already made some progress in this regard. A tally of articles published in *AMJ* between January 2001 and August 2003 shows that 25 percent had at least one international author (defined in terms of an author's institutional affiliation). Moreover, 17 percent had a first author from a non–North American university. In addition, at least 19 percent of the articles during that year and a half were based on data from non–North American countries (this percentage is somewhat of an underestimate, as some international authors did not specify the nationality associated with their data, and studies of U.S. multinationals were treated as North American even if they included some data from non-U.S. subsidiaries). Of the non-American authors involved, 43 percent had institutional affiliations in Europe; 27 percent, in Asia; 16 percent, in Australia or New Zealand; and 14 percent, in Israel.

Still, we are eager to do more to ensure that international authors are motivated to read the *Journal* and submit their research to it. To that end, members of our editorial team continue to participate in a variety of workshops and roundtables focused on explaining how the *AMJ* review and publishing process works. Of particular interest to this "From the Editors" column are several symposia that have focused specifically on "publishing across borders." In these sessions, editors of various journals have discussed the unique challenges—and benefits—of submitting one's research across national, cultural, and language boundaries.

We attended two such symposia over the past few months, one at the Eastern Academy of Management meetings in Porto, Portugal, and one at the annual Academy meeting at Seattle. Editors were on hand from such journals as *Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Organization Studies, Journal of Management Inquiry, Group and Organization Management, Journal of Business Research*, and *Scandinavian Journal of Management*.

There was a surprising degree of consensus among the editors on a variety of points. First, all expressed eagerness to receive international submissions and a belief that the quality of research will increase as more manuscripts are obtained from around the globe. Second, none of the editors thought that his or her journal applied higher or lower acceptance standards to international submissions. At the same time, most editors indicated that they tried to "go the extra mile" for international submissions during the early stages of the review process. For example, *AMJ* editor Tom Lee often makes editorial suggestions to international authors, allowing them to revise their work before even entering it into the review process. Third, those editors who keep relevant statistics indicated that rejections are still higher for international submissions, although there is considerable variability across regions. Specifically, acceptance rates are relatively higher for authors from northern Europe, Israel, East Asia, and Australia-New Zealand, and relatively lower for other international authors. We should also note, however, that the number of submissions from other regions of the world (such as Africa, southern Europe, and South America) is also lower.

Questions from the audience in these sessions revealed concerns among non–North American authors that their research might not receive a favorable review because it is "different." Among the differences mentioned were perceptions that non–North American research was more likely to be critical of management, to take the perspective of stakeholders other than managers or shareholders

We thank Don Bergh, Tom Lee, and Marshall Schminke for helpful comments on a previous version of this editorial. Also, special thanks to Eleanor O'Higgins of University College, Dublin, who showed us firsthand how one's words are often interpreted differently by someone from another culture.

(employees, unions, or the general public, for instance), and to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods.

Ironically, the editors on the panel indicated that one of the reasons they sought international submissions was that they *hoped* they would be different in some way—for example, that they would offer different ways of posing questions or interpreting findings, or that they would illuminate the boundary conditions of findings generated in North American settings. As Jean McGuire *(Journal of Business Research)* put it: "Most editors believe they are looking to broaden the type of articles they publish. The trick is to be different, while not violating journal readers' expectations by too much."

We believe that Jean's comment is very astute and contains the underpinnings of a solid strategy for trying to achieve publication success at *AMJ* (or any other journal, for that matter). Moreover, we believe that this advice pertains equally to non–North American and domestic authors. Let's address the two parts of her statement in turn.

"The Trick Is to Be Different"

Although non–North American scholars often worry about being "different," differences represent an opportunity to make a real contribution. Many of the most important research contributions have resulted from the sharing of ideas between people who differ from one another in some way—for example, academics and practitioners, or researchers from different disciplines (Campbell, Daft, & Hulin, 1982; McCall & Bobko, 1990; Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999).

Similarly, in the area of theoretical (as opposed to empirical) contributions, Murray Davis's (1971) analysis showed that the most influential sociological theories become widely cited, not because they are necessarily "accurate" or "correct," but rather, because they are "interesting." On the basis of an examination of the content and subsequent citation rates of various sociological theories, Davis concluded that in order to generate interest, a new theory *had* to violate at least *some* expectations of readers. If it did not, the readers' perception was that no value was added. At the same time, however, (and consistent with Jean's statement), interesting and impactful theories also did not violate *too many* assumptions, or violate core assumptions by *too much,* since doing so was likely to invite psychological rejection by readers.

Additional support for the idea that being different can enhance the odds of becoming published in *AMJ* comes from a prior analysis of the most common reasons for rejection of *AMJ* submissions. In a previous "From the Editors," we found that the single most common reason for manuscript rejection over a nine-month period spanning 2001 and 2002 was perceived "lack of contribution" (Rynes, 2002). Within this broad category, there were various subcategories: overly narrow contribution, unclear importance, not very surprising, and low value-added relative to prior research.

We believe that the specific perspectives that come from living in a less-represented culture can be a clear asset in producing "surprising" research ideas and ones that are likely to be seen as adding value. But despite this potential, it is also true that the incremental contribution hurdle is one that often trips up international authors. This is because scholars in other parts of the world are sometimes unaware of the many debates, terminologies, measures, and methods playing out in *AMJ* and other top North American journals—just as North American authors are generally blissfully ignorant of research conversations that might be relevant to their own work, but that are occurring in Asia or Latin America. Lack of exposure to prior discourse clearly hurts in the review process, as reviewers ask why a submitted manuscript is: (1) "reinventing the wheel," or (2) creating new measures where well-validated ones already exist, or (3) not citing the relevant research. Thus, we would be negligent if we did not recommend that researchers who wish to publish in *AMJ,* regardless of their location, familiarize themselves with what has gone before in this and in other top North American journals.

Jone Pearce has aptly described the challenge of gaining familiarity with North American publications from other parts of the world. She used the metaphor of an "intellectual cafe" to describe the journal publication process:

> One can think of American doctoral programs as intensive five-year immersions in scholarly conversation. Anyone who spends 70 hours a week for five years frequenting the same café, with the same patrons, will become very comfortable with the conversational flow—able to anticipate others' reactions, exchange "in-jokes" with just a few words, and be sensitive to long-standing feuds and affections. Of course, outsiders blundering into this cozy circle will be treated like the tourists they are. (Pearce, 1999: 148)

So, how does one begin to break into this circle? Here, we draw on one of the best sources we know for information on preparing submissions to scholarly journals—*Writing for Scholarly Publication,* by Anne Sigismund Huff (1999). She has provided a step-by-step guide for negotiating the most common land mines on the path to publication. Moreover, she does it in an inviting and nonthreatening way, providing helpful exercises at each phase of the research process.

Huff, like Pearce, thinks about writing as "conversation." Therefore, she recommends that—once you have chosen a topic that is interesting and important to you, and arouses your passion—you should find "conversants—specific written works that the author hopes directly to engage with his or her writing." To translate this advice into action, if your goal is to publish in *AMJ,* you would look to prior issues of this journal to see who has been discussing your topic and the major areas of contention. This step is also likely to enable you to identify important conversants in journals other than *AMJ;* look at what they have to say as well.

Once you have done this, imagine yourself at a table with three or four of the most important researchers on your topic. Having read their views, what would you like to say to them? What new element would you like to bring to the conversation? Imagine yourself completing the following sentence: "Yes, but have you considered . . .?"

Perhaps the leading discussants of your topic have been narrowly focused on shareholder returns. You might want to interject the question, "But what happens to the employees, the environment, or to longer-term returns if the (apparent) managerial implications are followed?" Or perhaps previous conversants have all taken a quantitative approach to your topic. In that case, the literature may yield a variety of estimates of the sizes of various relationships, but little clear understanding of how or why such relationships exist. You might decide that carefully designed qualitative research (or process-oriented quantitative research) might fill some important gaps in understanding. Or you might read about a managerial technique that seems to be working well in the United States but that, you believe, would be unsuccessful if transported to your own part of the world. That insight, too, can be the start of an empirical investigation that might identify important boundary conditions to what is presently "known" or believed by management scholars. Another contribution would be to submit research on some approach to management practiced elsewhere but so far not well known in North America. Managerial aspects of *guanxi* are a case in point.

According to Huff, the identification of prior conversants "more sharply focuses the research question and embeds it in a stream of already existing discourse, thus increasing the likelihood of publication if 'rules of good conversation are followed'" (Huff, 1999: 45). By identifying prior conversants, you will be more likely to overcome three of the most common causes of manuscript rejection: generating redundant theories using new terminology; making an incremental contribution that is judged to be too small or unclear; and creating new (and often unvalidated) measures where well-validated ones already exist. Moreover, these are the kinds of flaws that are generally regarded as fatal or irredeemable. In contrast, problems with exposition or analysis can usually be overcome by authors who conscientiously work to follow the recommendations given in good, developmental reviews.

"Don't Violate Readers' Expectations by Too Much"

As associate editors, we have noticed that the conditions Pearce alludes to often combine to produce a distinctive style among international submissions. Consider the following excerpt from a review of a paper submitted by a non–North American author (whose native tongue was, nevertheless, English):

> About halfway through your paper I was lost. I retraced my steps a few times, but I still didn't know where I was at that point, or where the paper was taking me. Familiar structural guideposts or trail markers that? *AMJ* readers like myself have come to expect are missing. . . . I believe the reason the sequence of typical sections is important is that they capture an idealized logic that social scientists are trained to follow in theory-testing research. Ideas and previous evidence come first (Introduction), then predictions about the world (Hypotheses), then observations of the world (Methods), a comparison of observations to predictions (Results), and finally conclusions about the original ideas in light of the comparison (Discussion). This sequence is clearly what *AMJ* readers have come to expect, *unless you make it clear beforehand that this logic is not what you plan to follow*. That is, if you're going to take readers like me down a new path of logic, you need to make that new path very clear at the beginning of the paper. You also need to hold my hand while I'm on the new path, telling me where I am, where I'm going, and why I need to head back to places I've already been.

Once again, Huff has an excellent suggestion for avoiding such a review. She follows up her advice to choose a topic and narrow one's focus by identifying conversants with the suggestion that one find and use "exemplars—documents that are already in the literature that accomplish the kind of task you are trying to accomplish *in an effective way*" (1999: 55). She goes on: "There is no reason to reinvent the wheel when writing, especially because scholarly conversations typically follow conventions that facilitate clear communication. Exemplars can be used to speed the scholar's understanding of these conventions" (Huff, 1999: 55). Unlike conversants, exemplars need not be in the writer's own area of scholarly interest; indeed, it is probably good to find at least one or two that are not.

By addressing these two simple steps—finding conversants and exemplars and using them to shape your research question and all that follows—Huff's formula guards against the most common sources of fatal flaws and rejection. In most cases, a manuscript's potential for contribution is largely sealed by decisions made at the very earliest stages (that is, those about research question, design, and measures). By taking Huff's advice seriously, you may greatly enhance the odds of successfully contributing to the conversation of your choice.

What Else Can You Do?

Regardless of minor differences in how various editors attending the two sessions on publishing international work assessed the current situation for non–North American authors, their practical advice was always the same: Get into the game! Only if you participate in the conversation will others benefit from your ideas. Only by taking the first steps of preparing and submitting an article for international submission will you receive the critical (but hopefully constructive) feedback that will continue to improve the chances of success over time.

Beyond searching electronic databases and prior issues of target journals, international authors can also take advantage of meetings of regional associations such as the British Academy of Management, the Asian Academy of Management, the European Group for Organizational Studies, and the International Association for Chinese Management Research. In addition, the U.S.-based Eastern Academy of Management holds its meeting outside the United States every other year, and the Western Academy of Management will be meeting in Shanghai in 2004.

The face-to-face conversations that occur at such meetings can be important in two ways. First, they provide opportunities to make personal contacts that might turn into eventual research relationships. Second, they help identify ongoing conversations in different parts of the globe that, although addressing similar issues, use different key words and terminology and so tend to frustrate electronic or journal index searches.

In addition, some very basic steps authors can take to further enhance their chances of success should be remembered. Besides doing sound research on a worthwhile topic that makes a real contribution to management theory and practice, basics include these:

1. Read the *AMJ* "Information for Contributors" page at *http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/contributor_information.html* (or in the front of every issue).
2. Read the *AMJ* "Style Guide for Authors" at *http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/style_guide.html* (in many issues).
3. Read the *AMJ* "Guidelines for Reviewers" at *http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/reviewer_guidelines.html*. (It will give you a clear idea of what *AMJ* reviewers are supposed to be looking for in submissions such as yours.)
4. Use a "spell checker" set for United States English. This usually comes as an option in your word-processing software. Spelling mistakes frequently aggravate reviewers, who interpret them as signs of carelessness and wonder whether the data were collected and analyzed carelessly, too.
5. Have a colleague or other professional who is a native English speaker read and correct your English. If at all possible, choose someone who understands the type of work you are doing so that your intended meaning does not get distorted in the editorial process.
6. Have a colleague or two in your own specialty peer-review your manuscript before you submit it. They will probably foresee many of the aspects of your submission that reviewers will comment on, and you can make appropriate revisions to forestall such feedback in the review process.
7. Expect success. Scholars like yourself have published here before you. If you expect success, your likelihood of achieving it is increased. You become a prophet who can fulfill your own prophesy. This works in the opposite direction, too: don't expect to fail! (Eden, 2003).
8. However, if your manuscript does get rejected, try not to personalize the outcome. Submitting to a journal with a 10 percent acceptance rate is risky for *everybody*. We all get rejected, and it is never easy. On the other hand, people who succeed in getting their voices heard somehow manage to find ways to keep themselves moving forward in the face of rejection and other obstacles.

Final Thoughts

To summarize, those who have thought carefully about the problems of publishing across boundaries agree on the following points:

- The world of scholarly discourse will be improved as new and different voices are added to the exchange.
- *AMJ* and the other Academy of Management journals *want* to publish international submissions.
- Publishing across boundaries is a skill that, like other difficult skills, requires lots of work but *can be mastered*.
- There can be great personal rewards in improving the skills required for publication, even if your manuscript is ultimately rejected.

For those of you who are thinking of submitting your first manuscript to *AMJ*, we leave you with the following thoughts from Jone Pearce:

> People can converse, can understand one another, with surprisingly little common language. . . . You can keep trying, keep rephrasing and reapproaching an issue until you do understand one another. When colleagues converse with limited common language, they may miss each other's clever wordplay and literary references, but if they stick with each other long enough, they can learn things of much greater value than they can from the same old café conversation. (1999: 153)

We subtitled this column "Promoting the Internationalization of *AMJ*." This column is our "promotion." We are committed to providing the unique collegial service of the famous *AMJ* developmental review process to all authors who submit their work to us, no matter where they originate. We promise to look for the "pearls" in your data and your ideas. If we see merit in those basic essentials, we will work with you to develop your exposition and to solidify your analyses. We accept only the best, but provide developmental feedback to all. The rest is up to you.

Dov Eden and Sara Rynes
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