Journal of Management & Organization, 20:6 (2014), pp. 711–714

doi:10.1017/jmo.2014.69

EDITORIAL

The view from the 'other side of the desk'

This issue will be the last for me in the role of Editor-in-Chief. My 3 years in the role (2012–2014) have seen the Journal undergo significant changes. I will not detail these at this point, but moving to the Scholar One manuscript management system in 2012 followed by Cambridge Journals taking over as the publisher of Journal of Management & Organization in 2013 has put the Journal on a new and very strong trajectory.

What is more likely to be of interest for most people are some of my insights from my time as an editor. Before I stepped into any sort of editorial role, I had a number of assumptions about the way the journal system worked, how decisions were made and the roles that the senior people running the journals actually undertook. Many of these proved to be wrong and understanding what happens on the 'other side of the desk' may assist all people involved with, or submitting to journals.

EDITORS WANT TO PUBLISH YOUR WORK

Journals exist to publish papers. Without a certain number of papers, they would cease to exist. Obviously, the better journals receive a quantity of submissions that far exceed the space available, and yet, without the active participation of editors, even such journals would struggle to fill their page limit. I do not know if this is a phenomena that is peculiar to management scholarship, but reviewers seem to be extremely choosey and find all sorts of reasons to suggest that a paper should be rejected. Editors, including those from the most prestigious management publications, often have to override at least some of these decisions to ensure that there is a publication pipeline. The most common issue is that reviewers identify some points that need to be addressed and then recommend a rejection. I therefore find myself writing to reviewers to let them know that I have given the paper an R&R (revise and resubmit) as whilst the issue may need to be addressed, I am of the opinion that it can be addressed through a revision. After all, this is what the R&R process is all about. I would like to find ways to develop papers to bring them up to the quality level that we seek for publication. If this means we accept a greater number of papers, then this is a problem that we can work towards solving.

I personally take no pleasure in writing rejection letters as I am only too familiar with what it is like to be on the receiving end of such a letter. If the paper is to be rejected, I would like to think that there is some feedback that will help the author(s) develop different elements of their research. These 'failures' are the basis for our learning and thus, whilst rejection is always painful, I do hope that every paper that comes into *JMO* (with the exception of those that are obviously unsuitable as they apply to different discipline and therefore receive a 'lack of alignment' desk rejection) receives some feedback that helps the development of the author's research in some way. The good news is that whilst it may not seem obvious upon an initial read, reviewers are *generally* of the same view and tend to be fairly developmental. There is no doubt that we have some way to go in this respect, but I have noticed that over the last decade and even 5 years in particular, reviewers have tended to adopt a more developmental tone.

A REJECTED PAPER IS NOT NECESSARILY A BAD PAPER

I read every paper that is submitted to the Journal (some more quickly than others). In doing so, I naturally form opinions as to those that I think are strong papers and those that are not nearly as convincing. Once the desk rejections have been dealt with, either myself or one of the Associate Editors manages the review process. I see papers that I felt were very strong being rejected and others that I felt were somewhat marginal receiving R&R decisions. This is part of the imperfect process of peer review. As an editor, I may give a paper an R&R when there are mixed reviews (i.e., an R&R as well as a reject recommendation) or where the recommendations for a rejection are mild and the issues identified can be addressed. But in cases where the reviewers are clearly taking a strong position that the paper should be rejected, I am unlikely to counter such a position by offering the author(s) an R&R. The reality is that the reviewers will probably still feel negatively about the paper in the next round and it is likely to be a real struggle to get the paper through the system. Sometimes it is better that authors get an opportunity to go elsewhere sooner rather than later instead of struggling through multiple revisions that may end up forcing the paper into a somewhat different direction.

Having a good paper rejected is a common phenomena – just ask Jay Barney about the number of times his seminal resource-based view paper was rejected before it found a home in *Journal of Management* (Barney, 1991). In Google Scholar this paper has now received over 36,000 cites. In the field of economics, Gans and Shepard contacted 20 Nobel Prize and John Bates Clark Medal winners and found that those who used journals (as opposed to books) to be their principal means of communicating their work had all had their papers rejected. Paul Krugman estimated that at least 60% of his published work had originally been rejected (Gans and Shepard, 1994).

Not only do reviewers get it wrong, but it is challenging for editors to push too hard with a paper that we may feel has real potential as the management of reviewers in the longer term is an important component of the editor's role. If reviewers feel that their opinions are not being respected after they have donated at least a couple of hours to undertake the review, there is a much higher probability that they will not accept a review assignment in the future. Thus, even papers that I think are strong will sometimes be rejected. I have no doubt that with a different set of reviewers, at least some of these papers could have progressed through the system.

THE LITTLE THINGS MATTER

I recently read a brief article that found that recruiters spend an average of just 6 seconds reviewing each new CV. I would like to think that the editorial team and the reviewers spend more time than this on a submitted paper. However, they are already forming a viewpoint within the first couple of pages and from there will tend to be looking to pick out some points that reinforce this early impression. This is particularly the case in respect of papers that they feel should be rejected. A poorly worded abstract, an introduction that does not provide a clear rationale for the paper or one that does not clearly articulate the contribution made by the paper may be enough to unconsciously push a reviewer to look for problems and issues as a basis for recommending that the paper be rejected. Grammar, referencing, sentence structure and probably most important of all, following the guidelines for submission, do matter and can make the difference between and R&R and an outright rejection.

I think that every editor recognizes that they will receive submissions that have been rejected elsewhere and following some rework (hopefully) is submitted to another journal. If a paper is submitted that has not been changed at all and still aligns with the style guide of the prior journal (especially if they require some rather unique features) then automatically the editors and reviewers are going to start wondering what is wrong with the paper and why did it get rejected. In essence, reviewers come to the review with a view of identifying why it should be rejected rather than how can we help the authors develop the paper to the point where we can publish it. Maybe this is the wrong attitude, but the reality is that it does happen and hence – the little things really do matter!

MAKING A THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

Unlike the physical sciences, in management, there is not a tradition of undertaking and publishing replication studies. To be published, there is an expectation that the research will add to our understanding of a particular phenomena or be approaching the issue in a unique manner. A failure to add to our theoretical knowledge is the most common reason for a desk reject and probably accounts for close to 75% of such rejections. Undertaking a study in a different context is not an automatic contribution, rather there needs to be an explanation as to why this particular context may produce a different result than what has been found in research to date. For example, completing research in an emerging economy may be interesting, but there needs to be a detailed logic as part of the theory building process that explains why the results are likely to differ to those that have been presented previously (which may have come from North American and/or Western Europe). Thus explanations in terms of institutional factors, cultures or other relevant dimensions must be developed to provide new insights. It is this sort of approach which is at the heart of context driven research as I outlined earlier this year (Galvin, 2014). Whilst I write unique comments specific to each desk-rejected paper, I often finish the section, 'What the paper needed to do is to provide us with either an extension to our existing theoretical knowledge (including determining limits for existing theoretical frameworks) or make us think about existing phenomena in a new way'. Every author should ask themselves whether and how they achieve these goals.

WHY DO REVIEWS TAKE SO LONG?

Luckily not every day, but certainly many times per week I am asked for an update as to where a paper is at. This can start as early as within 2 weeks of submission. After all, the reviewing process only takes a couple of hours in most instances and yet the review process tends to take months. The reality is that every paper that comes into the Journal is read by myself and a decision made as to whether to progress the paper to review or not. I try to do this within 14 days. The paper then goes to an Associate Editor, who is likely to also undertake an initial review before seeking reviewers. The hardest part is finding reviewers. As the number of papers being submitted to all journals has exploded, reviewers are being asked to undertake more and more reviews. I know that many of my colleagues are now trying to limit the number of reviews that they do to two or three per month. This means that they reject a lot of reviewer requests. Sometimes we get lucky and the first two people we ask to review say yes. More likely, we send out a reviewer request and then after no response send out a reminder after 5 days. Normally at around the 2-week mark we start the process again and invite more reviewers. Each new invitation therefore adds about two weeks to the process. These days it is certainly not uncommon to end up inviting 10 or more reviewers to get two people to agree to undertake the review. This is common across all sorts of journals and I have heard of cases in leading journals where reviewer invitations have hit the 20 mark, and then of course, getting reviewers to agree to do the review is just the first step. Actually getting the review on time is another matter. I am glad to say that most papers do not suffer from cases where reviewers go missing, never finish their reviews or stop responding to any communication, but it does still happen. When it does, this causes serious problems as the process essentially has to start again, and finally, especially in the case of split decisions, the Associate Editor will read the paper again to determine which way to move and what to focus on in the decision letter. Yes, sometimes we take far too long for a variety of reasons, but honestly, all the volunteers (and everyone is a volunteer) generally go out of their way to do the best that they can.

Overall, my time as Editor-in-Chief has taught me that we have a flawed system, but at this stage it is the best we have. We get a number of things right. The double blind process is enacted without

https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2014.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

compromise. Reviewers never know the authorship of papers under review and whilst they might guess, I believe that we make our decisions – as imperfect as they are – without favour. Reviews are becoming more developmental. We help to educate reviewers by sending them copies of the decision letters and the complete set of reviews (blinded of course). We assess reviewers (and score them) each time so that we can move our best reviewers onto the Editorial Board and lessen our use of tardy or poor reviewers.

However, we still have our problems. We reject good papers. We rely upon reviewers that have biases and often bring these biases to the review process and end up commenting upon what they would like to see done, given their own interests rather than what was actually done. We use reviewers that are not always as expert in a field as we might like. And more often than I would like, we take too long to review papers and get decisions to authors. But given that we are assessing unique, cutting-edge research, it is impressive that we get it right as often as we do.

Fundamental to the ability of the Journal to do the work that it does are the team of Associate Editors, the Editorial Board and the reviewers. As I sign-off I would like to thank each and every one of the Associate Editors that are either current or have held a position during my tenure. Thanks to (in alphabetical order), Veronique Ambrosini, Felix Arndt, Roya Ayman, Bevan Catley, Yuka Fujimoto, Charmine Hartel, Tui McKeown, Andrew Noblet, Tim O'Shannassy, Laura Petitta, Stephen Teo for their contribution as an Associate Editor.

Professor Peter Galvin
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Management & Organization
Graduate School of Business
Curtin University
Perth, WA, Australia

References

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, *17*(1), 99–120.

Galvin, P. (2014). A new vision for the Journal of Management & Organization: The role of context. *Journal of Management and Organization*, *20*(1), 1–5.

Gans, J. S., & Sheperd, G. B. (1994). How are the mighty fallen: Rejected classic articles by leading economists. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *8*(1), 165–179.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2014.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press