1. Publishing in management – exhilaration, bafflement and frustration

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This book offers a series of chapters intended to help demystify the journal publishing process. The chapters provide practical advice on a wide range of important topics. A quick look at the table of contents reveals that our author list contains leading academics in the management discipline. You may wonder why these very busy and experienced people have taken the time to share their thoughts on the publication process. Simply put, because advancing knowledge by publishing in leading journals is at the heart of the academic enterprise. Promotion systems for academics in management in universities around the world stress the significance of an individual scholar's contribution based on her/his published work, primarily in journals. Thus, career advancement, scholarly reputation and pay are intimately tied to being able to publish in journals.

Scholars find the journal publishing process exhilarating, baffling and frustrating in equal measure. The professional joy and excitement of receiving an acceptance letter following a long-drawn-out process in which you have diligently responded to successive rounds of reviewers' comments is probably only matched by a letter awarding a research grant. Contrast this to the sense of dejection and distress that accompanies a rejection letter. This is further exacerbated if the reviewers' comments and decision appear to be harsh and make little sense. It is even more disappointing if the paper appears to have been progressing through different rounds of reviewing only to be rejected late in the process. One has to start all over again. Whether we realize it or not, academics are not too dissimilar to actors in that they constantly have to audition their work in journals or to research funders. Learning to live with rejection is a key part of the role. We cannot be successful with every submission.

Even though the chances of acceptance are reducing to well below 10 per cent in many leading journals in the discipline, there is increasing pressure on academics to publish in journals, and in what are considered to be the 'right' journals in particular. While individual departments and schools have had internal 'private' journals lists for many years to aid colleagues' decisions when submitting work and to aid assessments of quality at the point of recruitment or promotion, a number of 'public' national and international journals lists have gained prominence in recent years. These have increasingly replaced the Business and Management journal rankings produced by services such as the Web of Science™.

In the United Kingdom, the Chartered Association of Business Schools created the 'Academic Journal Guide' in 2015 building on the 'The ABS Guide 2010'. This ranked 1,401 journals across five categories ranging from 4* (journals of 'distinction') to 1 (journals of 'modest standard'). Since 2007, the Australian Business Deans Council has produced successive iterations of its 'Journal Quality List'. The latest version encompassed 2,767 journals and rated them A* to C. In France, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) has produced a 'Journal Ranking in Economics and Management' since 2004. This ranks journals from 1 ('distinguished') to 4 ('low selectivity'). In 2008, the European Science Foundation developed an 'initial' journal list for humanities – the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH). Now run by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), this was relaunched in 2014 as ERIH PLUS and has been extended to include the social sciences. Although not an evaluative ranking service, journals are included in accordance with published criteria. The main aims of this initiative are to 'enhance the global visibility of high-quality research in the humanities and social sciences across Europe, and to facilitate access to research journals published in all European languages'. Finally, several trade publishers have produced journal lists as part of the intellectual capital or research scores in their MBA rankings. The most prominent are the lists used by *Bloomberg Businessweek* and the *Financial Times*.

Given that several of these lists contribute to the rankings of business schools, they have a significant influence on the perceptions of reputations of schools and so impact on the scholars whose published work in these journals undergirds their rankings. As two of the editors of this volume noted in an editorial for the *Journal of Management Studies* (Clark and Wright, 2007, p. 613),

> Whereas the ranking of journals in which people publish has always had implications for personal reputation, peer recognition and career advancement, increasingly it is impacting much more directly on institutional reputations and department rankings and in turn on access to resources and potential recruitment of staff and students. Individual publication choices and success are therefore assuming ever greater institutional significance.

To manage institutional reputations, individual business schools are increasingly abandoning their own lists and adopting those mentioned above. As a consequence, scholars in different business schools are being encouraged to submit only to those journals which are more highly ranked on these lists. It comes as no surprise that submission rates, desk rejection rates (i.e., rejection by the editors prior to seeking reviewer comments) and overall rejection rates in 'top tier' journals have increased (Judge, Cable, Colbert and Rynes, 2007, p. 501; Monastersky, 2005). Indeed, we have experienced such trends during our tenures as editors of different journals with submission rates increasing significantly, desk rejection rates creeping to over 50 per cent and general acceptance rates dropping to well below 10 per cent (see, for example, Clark and Wright, 2007).

Although we lack the hard data needed to draw a firm conclusion, our observation when acting as journal editors over the past couple of decades is that landing reviewers who are bona fide experts on a journal submission's topic has become increasingly difficult across time. Leading journals are attracting more and more submissions every year while the pool of available expert reviewers appears to be increasing only slightly, if at all. This has created a basic supply–demand imbalance that does not work in authors' favour. One potential result is that any given submission may not be receiving the same calibre of expert vetting as it would have in years past. Relative to ten or twenty years ago, a paper that you submit today may be assigned to reviewers who are much less experienced and who know far less about your specific topic.

Beyond this systemic macro trend, a quick immersion into the voluminous literature on the peer-review process indicates that there are a number of failings that either individually or in combination may prevent or forestall innovative material from being published in highly regarded journals. In a seminal study on peer review, Peters and Ceci (1982) resubmitted 12 articles to the psychology journals in which they had already been refereed and published 18 to 32 months earlier. To disguise the papers a number of 'cosmetic' alterations were made to the titles, abstracts and opening paragraphs in the introduction, but their 'meaning was not changed'. In addition, 'fictitious' names for authors and institutional affiliations were used. Nine of the manuscripts were sent out for review (three were detected). Only two of the eighteen reviewers recommended that the papers be accepted. Hence, only one article was accepted with the consequence that one journal made an identical evaluation over the two periods of time. This article generated a voluminous response (over 70 commentaries in the same issue) and provoked heated discussion across different disciplines as to the ability of the review process to determine the level of quality, interestingness, contribution and likely impact of an article under consideration (see, for example, Bedeian, 2003; Campanario, 1998; Miller, 2006; Osterloh and Frey, 2015; Starbuck, 2003, 2005). Given the critical weaknesses in the review process, it has been questioned by a range of commentators whether superior quality work is published in journals as a consequence of reviewers' comments and therefore whether the most able scholars are being hired and promoted on the basis of such published work. This literature highlights three general flaws in the journal review process.

First, reviewers are often accused of being overly harsh in their judgements. They approach manuscripts assiduously looking to expose weaknesses rather than balancing these with an equivalent appreciation of the merits. In a system where the work of others is evaluated anonymously, the incentives to be constructive and polite may lessen. People may communicate more bluntly than they would face-to-face.

Furthermore, reviews are solicited from people who are invariably busy and have simply added a further task to their already over-committed diaries. In these circumstances, reviewers may adopt a shorthand approach in which they prioritize the finding of faults and weaknesses rather engaging positively with the ideas, arguments and evidence in the paper from the author's point of view. In addition, as Starbuck (2003) suggests, this approach may in part arise from reviewers seeing themselves as superior to the authors (in their role as reviewers). He comments: 'Occasionally reviewers seem arrogant, disrespectful, even nasty' (p. 344). They believe they know better than the authors and could write a better article. They therefore often see their role as telling the author to write the paper they would write. This can lead to a situation where authors feel their ideas are unappreciated, undervalued and ignored.

Managing reviewers is a key task that falls to editors. In our experience, there are three basic approaches that editors take to this task. 'Posties' (or, in US terminology, 'mail carriers') simply collect the reviews, add little independent thought or synthesis of reviewers' ideas, pass along reviews to the authors and accept a paper only if the reviewers say to do so. Editors abdicating their authority in this way can be very harmful to authors. For example, authors may feel that they are being forced to write the paper the reviewers want them to write or responding to points that are superficial, misguided or just wrong. In these circumstances, reviewers may become uninvited ghost-writers and/or veto wielders.

In a recent baffling case, a revision of a conceptual paper was rejected without all of the reviews being received. One reviewer recommended acceptance with no further revisions, a second reviewer vehemently opposed the paper, and the third reviewer was not sent the revision due to an administrative glitch. The action editor based his decision on the fact that the negative reviewer 'was extremely forceful' in his/her comments. After it became known that the third reviewer was not given the opportunity to participate, the action editor refused the authors' request to collect the third review and then revisit his decision. Worse, in the first round of review, the decision letter had been written based on the first two reviews and the third review was sent to the authors about a week later with no effort to reconcile important discrepancies between it and the other reviews. Sure enough, some of the very negative reviewer's key concerns about the revision revolved around material that was added to the paper in order to respond to the third reviewer. Although most 'postie editors' are not as callow and impotent as this one, the anecdote illustrates the danger of allowing reviewers to dominate decision making in the review process.

A much different approach is adopted by 'emperors'. These editors downplay or even disregard the reviews; only their opinions matters, even if they know little about the subject matter. Luckily, these people are few and far between. Like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's legendary fable, however, they resist being told that they have 'no clothes'.

Lastly, 'judges' live by the mantra that reviewers review and editors decide. They gather relevant evidence by reading the paper and studying the reviews, analyse the evidence, and make informed decisions. When revision opportunities are granted, judges synthesize reviewers' input in their decision letters in order to give authors the best opportunity to succeed. Importantly, judges are not afraid to contradict a reviewer within the effort to advance the state of research knowledge. Some editors of this type emphasize that reviewers must 'step into the framework of the authors when evaluating a paper, rather than imposing their preferred framework or perspective on those authors (and thereby asking the authors to write the reviewer's preferred paper)' (Miller and Van de Ven, 2015, p. 118; see also Clair, 2015).

Second,[1] as Peters and Ceci (1982) suggest, a number of factors have been found to bias reviewer judgements (see Campanario [1998] for a full review). Where authors' identities are known, their institutional affiliations and social networks may influence judgements. However, these factors are reduced when a blind review process is used, although not eradicated because with the Internet and electronic dissemination of manuscripts an author's identity is very difficult to hide (see Hillman and Rynes, 2007). Here issues such as the apparent complexity of language, use of citations, appropriate jargon, sophisticated statistical procedures, and presentation of positive and significant results that do not merely replicate previous findings have all been found to influence or bias decisions.

Third, and perhaps the area which has received greatest empirical attention, studies in a range of disciplines have consistently reported low overall inter-referee agreement (see Hendrick, 1977; Gottfredson, 1978; Scott, 1974; Cicchetti, 1980, 1991; Scar and Weber, 1978). Evidence within management studies is more scant. Starbuck (2003) reports a study he undertook while editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly*. An examination of 500 pairs of reviews revealed a correlation of 0.12. He concluded that 'It was so low that knowing what one reviewer had said about a manuscript would tell me almost nothing about what a second reviewer had said or would say' (p. 346).

Given this context, authors need to take every step they can within the confines of professionalism and ethics to maximize their submission's chance of success. Accordingly, this book's chapters are intended to provide actionable advice that authors can leverage. Lest our thoughts in this brief introduction be taken as overly pessimistic, we want to stress that we have found the research process to be personally and professionally fulfilling, as have the authors who have contributed to this book. Our hope is that each reader will find one or more tips in the chapters that follow that resonate, will act on these tips, and will be better able to place research papers in our discipline's leading journals.

We have structured the book in three parts. The book can, of course, be read in its entirety, but many readers may prefer to dip into various topics to suit their particular needs. Part I contains general contributions on important aspects of the publishing process. We start in Chapter 2 with an in-depth case study of a paper travelling through the review process which includes the perspectives of the authors, the editor and the reviewers. This chapter sets the scene for the remainder of the book and is followed by a chapter that examines the range of issues arising at different stages in the journal submission and review processes (Chapter 3). Ethics and integrity in academic research has always been important, but it has taken on particular significance in recent years. Accordingly, we devote Chapter 4 specifically to this topic. As academic careers are not just about getting that first job and then achieving tenure but are also about sustaining publications in the long run, Chapter 5 outlines some strategies for achieving this. Increasingly, the focus of attention is on publishing in leading international journals, which are oftentimes US based. However, as Chapter 6 shows, using the example of Asia, other contexts can provide opportunities to publish quality research. This chapter discusses the similarities and differences in publishing Asian research in Asia management journals as compared to those in North America. The final chapter in Part I presents insights into the deficiencies of the review process and how authors should consider and approach feedback from reviewers.

Part II contains short contributions on specific topics essential to resolving practical key issues in undertaking good research and the preparation of publishable manuscripts. We have organized this part into four sections relating to Becoming a Scholar (Chapters 8–12), Getting Your Methods Right (Chapters 13–15), Navigating the Review Process (Chapters 16–18) and Understanding the Journals (Chapters 19–25). In soliciting these chapters, we encouraged authors to draw on their considerable experience as authors, editors and reviewers to share candid confidences that readers might not pick up anywhere else. They fully embraced this charge and we have picked up some great 'behind the curtain' tips while editing their chapters.

Part III (Chapters 26–32) contains contributions that address publishing across disciplinary boundaries. This part delves into the challenges of publishing in journals for scholars from other related disciplines including business history, economics, finance, human resource management, international business and psychology, and also for management scholars seeking to publish their work in journals in these areas. Each author presents insights regarding key issues of difference in the positioning of papers, use and development of theory, data and methods, analysis and discussion of findings, and contribution. The authors also identify differences in the review process between management journals and these other areas and provide specific examples from their own experience.

Finally, we thank all our contributors for the fascinating insights they have provided on publishing in management journals.

NOTE

1. This and the next paragraph are replicated with permission from Clark and Wright (2007).

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