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12-2016

### Management research in AMJ: Celebrating impact while striving for more

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#### Citation

GEORGE, Gerard. Management research in AMJ: Celebrating impact while striving for more. (2016). *Academy of Management Journal*. 59, (6), 1869-1877.

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## FROM THE EDITORS

# MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN *AMJ*: CELEBRATING IMPACT WHILE STRIVING FOR MORE

Over the years, I have read articles or listened to panel discussions that question the value of management scholarship, and often critiqued its relevance or insightfulness for an applied profession. On occasion, I have sided with those who are more pessimistic concerning our future as a field. While there are many truths in these commentaries, though, they might not give adequate credit to the robust knowledge production ecosystem that generates applied insight with scientific rigor. Yes, there is a lot more we can do, but we should also celebrate the work we do well. Having read more than 4,000 manuscripts as an editor, I believe that the management field is flourishing, and is indeed tackling topics of fundamental importance. The most important lesson that I have learned as editor is that the research enterprise is held dear by scholars who make resolute efforts to provide systematic evidence with the aspiration of creating positive impact well beyond the published page itself. In this final editorial of my term, I reflect on how our research could have even greater impact.

### MAKING RESEARCH IMPACTFUL

“Impact” for management scholars could be construed as the influence of our research on managerial practices or policies—and, if escalated further, the potential to create positive societal benefit. Promotion and tenure decisions hinge on whether a rising scholar is having impact on the field, or has the potential to do so. Though the impact goal is appropriately aspirational, the rubrics devolve into signals of the quality of the publication outlet and citations as proxies of research impact. Clearly, citations to our research do matter—they show whether our work has the capacity to shape future conversations within the scholarly community. But, citations remain a narrower metric for the impact of our work, especially when we consider a broader audience that supports or consumes our research efforts and findings. Impact tends to be elusive for junior and indeed many senior scholars. How can we attain this rather illusory impact, and what can we do to improve our research?

### Bolder Ideas

The journey to impact rightly starts with the topics we select to study, and how we make those decisions. Unfortunately, a majority of the papers I reviewed are still predicated on, and motivated by, gaps in the literature or methodological refinements. The challenge in motivating studies in such a manner is that it limits the reach or audience for the work significantly, while also limiting the potential novelty and significance of the scholar’s effort. In an earlier editorial, we suggested that scholars consider five criteria when picking topics that improve publishability: (1) significance, (2) novelty, (3) curiosity, (4) scope, and (5) actionability (Colquitt & George, 2011).

*Significance* comes from taking on “grand challenges” or pursuing bold ideas and adopting less conventional approaches to tackle large, unresolved managerial or societal problems. *Novelty* is about adding something new to an existing conversation or starting a new theoretical discourse. Our discussions have emphasized the novelty of a topic, which often is expressed as new predictors to explain existing and important outcomes. However, novelty can also be associated with the problem being defined; that is, a new phenomenon or outcome. *Curiosity* is the capacity of the topic to catch and hold the attention of a reader. *Scope* is the degree to which the landscape involved in a topic is adequately sampled, in terms of relevant constructs, mechanisms, and perspectives—an ambitious scope allows for a more comprehensive treatment of the phenomenon. Finally, a topic may be *actionable* by offering insights for managerial or organizational practice.

Though these five criteria improve publishability, I reckon that studies are publishable because they hold the potential for impact. The focus on impact shifts the discussion of our work with an emphasis on interestingness (Davis, 1971) to actionability (McGahan, 2007; Vermeulen, 2007). An impactful research agenda would preclude an overt emphasis on theoretical “gaps” in the literature, and instead would move our collective attention toward addressing problems or understanding emergent phenomena that are significant and relevant to our stakeholders.

## Learning from Exemplars

There have been several studies in this journal that have moved forward theory-driven conversations while having the potential for impact on practice. Instead of identifying specific articles based on my preference, I refer to *Academy of Management Journal* (*AMJ*) annual “Best Paper Award” finalists. Each year, the editor nominates a selection panel with its five members drawn from the editorial review board. The chair of the panel coordinates with other members and shortlists three finalists drawn from *AMJ* articles appearing in the previous calendar year. The chairs of the selection committee for the past three years were Don Hambrick (2014), John Hollenbeck (2015), and Susan Ashford (2016), respectively. In Table 1, I have the honor of sharing the selection panel comments of each of the finalists for the past three years with the belief that these examples and the panel comments could provide insight into how our work is interpreted and consumed by our peers. The nine studies have a good distribution of individual, team, organization, and institutional levels of analyses.

What is striking is the “significance” of the topics that the authors have chosen—these issues range from pregnancy in the workplace (Little et al., 2015) and intercultural conflict and creativity (Chua, 2013) to social movements (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015) and technological change (Kapoor & Klueter, 2015). Vashdi and colleagues (2013) followed surgical teams in a large hospital with a longitudinal field study design with interventions to show that action team learning has performance consequences. To study creativity and coordination, Harrison and Rouse (2014) studied modern dance groups where they could capture creativity and team dynamics. Wry and coworkers (2014) used secondary data, including patents and venture capital investment, and supplemented them with interviews of start-ups and investors to provide a holistic portrayal of the underlying dynamics of hybridization of identities. Ding et al. (2013) adopted a wider scope to study both supply-side and demand-side factors when examining gender differences in university scientists’ participation in corporate advisory boards. They found that the demand-side poses the more significant challenge, and has broader implications, for gender diversity on boards. Even when studying grand challenges such as enacting climate change policies, Schüßler et al. (2014) focused on actionability and how managing these “Conference of the Parties” events could be further improved for better outcomes.

Equally striking are the rich methodological approaches adopted by these authors that underscore

the detailed efforts at understanding the core phenomena. Some studies draw on more prevalent secondary databases, such as patents or financial data, but also supplement these data with rich interviews to better understand the underlying causal processes. Studies also conduct field surveys of networks or work practices, and combine them with lab or field experiments. Among the qualitative data used, there are a diversity of data sources drawn from video recordings, historical documents, and focus groups to corroborate interview-based evidence. In addition to the significance, novelty, and scope of the problems being examined, it becomes evident that these articles tend to adopt multiple data analytic approaches to unpack causal processes and explain the phenomenon to a granular extent such that actionable insight becomes possible.

## Focus on the Phenomenon

The world is changing and management theory should change with it. Impact could be derived from a novel insight or better explanations of a new, emergent phenomenon. One possible avenue for impact is to study phenomena where society does not yet have an intuitive gestalt. There is an inherent tendency to anchor ourselves to past theories without necessarily thinking about the changed context. Boundary conditions and causal mechanisms continue to evolve, which requires us to continually revisit and refine our understanding of organizations and their operating environments. This editorial team has used “From the Editor” notes actively to highlight important phenomena and changing trends with the intent of promoting discussion on new topics. In Table 2, we provide an overview of the topics covered. These topics include climate change (Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014), aging societies (Kulik, Ryan, Harper, & George, 2014), natural resources (George, Schillebeeckx, & Liak, 2015), digital money (Dodgson, Gann, Wladwsky-Berger, Sultan, & George, 2015), digital workforces (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016), and societal risk and resilience to disasters (van der Vegt, Essens, Wahlstrom, & George, 2015), among others.

A Special Research Forum provides a call for research on a topic of broad interest. In this issue, we showcase articles that tackle “Grand Challenges” or significant societal problems concerning which management scholars could play an important role in addressing global and local societal problems (George et al., 2016). The goal is to capture topics of renewed and cumulative interest, and, where the

**TABLE 1**  
**AMJ Best Paper Award Finalists (2014–2016)**

Study	Study Focus	Selection Panel Comments
Little, Major, Hinojosa, and Nelson (2015)	Pregnancy in the workplace Qualitative interviews with field survey data	This paper focuses on an issue that lies at the heart of the struggle for gender equality in the workplace. Theoretically the paper is very sophisticated—it draws on a range of perspectives to build a convincing explanation for why pregnant women use particular image maintenance strategies, and the effects of these strategies on women and their careers. The paper did a great job articulating strategies necessary for the organizational world that we live in today.
Vaccaro and Palazzo (2015)	Institutional change, social movements to counter organized crime Qualitative—case studies, public documents, interviews	The committee liked this extremely well done and well-written qualitative study that used historical records to capture a social movement started by seven university graduates who committed themselves to the struggle against organized crime in Italy. This paper is exemplary from a technical, qualitative methods standpoint, as constructs are teased out quite effectively and the reader is offered a very rich account of the efforts of the seven actors.
Kapoor and Klueter (2015)	Technological change and firm strategy Quantitative secondary data supplemented with interview data	This paper strikes a good balance between managerial application and depth of academic insight and rigor. The paper includes a macro study establishing a relationship, and then a micro study that captures the mechanisms explaining that relationship. The research has clear implications for management practice by explaining what types of investments will be more effective in helping firms navigate technological change.
Schübler, Ruling, and Wittneben (2014)	Climate change, institutional change Qualitative—interviews, observations, public documents	This paper highlighted the contested nature of the idea of climate change, a critical and under-researched issue. The authors are able to exploit the richness of their data partly due to the extensive experience of one of the coauthors in the domain of climate policy. The authors developed a rich set of data from multiple sources and displayed a great deal of innovation in the analysis of this data. The paper offers insights to policymakers, regulators, governments, and academics on the implications of the processes of field configuration, increasing field complexity, and limitations of Conference of the Parties events, and hints that transnational climate policy should potentially be managed differently.
Harrison and Rouse (2014)	Creativity and coordination Qualitative—interviews, observational data, video recordings, and focus groups	This paper was interesting and insightful, and adroitly integrated the literatures on creativity and coordination. The authors identify the importance of elastic coordination in an unconventional study context, and question the commonly held view of not only the implications of constraints in but also about the linearity of the creative process. The data were collected in a variety of ways in a relevant context in which the entirety of the creative process can be observed by the researchers and judged by experts. This work reflected a significant investment in data collection terms, and these non-routine data were analyzed in innovative ways. The conclusions from the study have broad applicability and highlight how autonomy and constraints are both important during different stages of the creative process.
Wry, Lounsbury, and Jennings (2014)	Category spanning, venture creation Quantitative secondary data with supplemental interview data	This is an interesting paper that focused on category spanning in the nanotechnology industry, with a specific focus on when start-ups are rewarded (or punished) based on hybridization. In other words, there is an asymmetric

**TABLE 1**  
**(Continued)**

Study	Study Focus	Selection Panel Comments
Chua (2013)	Intercultural conflict and creativity Quantitative—network survey, lab experiments	response to hybridization. The authors offer an alternate conceptualization of category spanning that draws on a long tradition in cognitive psychology research, arguing why it is important to develop theory that can account for the full range of reactions that hybrid organizations might elicit. The concept of hybridization can be used in numerous contexts, and that makes the broader applicability of the paper appealing. The use of a specific industry in conjunction with interviews with venture capitalists and CEOs that were presented alongside quantitative data analysis buttressed the arguments and findings of the paper. The theory from this paper can be easily used to reexamine research findings in corporate strategy, entrepreneurship, and international business. This paper convincingly delineates the impact of cultural disharmony on creativity in work settings. By cleverly deploying network and experimental studies, Chua demonstrates that intercultural tension has more far-reaching effects than previously realized. The author further establishes the mechanism for the effects, ruling out various other plausible explanations in careful experiments. At a time when we see increasing use of interdependent global work teams, these findings are extremely important.
Ding, Murray, and Stuart (2013)	Gender differences in university scientists' participation in corporate scientific advisory boards Quantitative secondary data	This paper addresses an exceedingly important issue: the gender gap in the scientific workforce. The authors first document a major gap in the proportion of female scientists on scientific advisory boards of biotechnology firms. They then examine what accounts for the gap—pitting supply-side theories of talent availability against demand-side theories of gender bias in selection processes. Using a highly rigorous research method, the authors find that demand-side biases are the major reason for the gender gap, which in turn has significant implications for policymakers.
Vashdi, Bamberger, and Erez (2013)	Coordination, complexity, and transitivity in action team learning Quantitative—longitudinal field study	The authors introduce creative ideas for understanding the effectiveness of “action teams,” or those that have constantly shifting membership. Moreover, the authors do this in a life-or-death setting: surgical teams. With highly innovative theorizing, rigorous research methods, and exceptionally clear exposition, this paper will be a landmark both for scholars and management practitioners.

articles adopt multiple theoretical lenses, levels of analyses and methodological approaches. In such cases, impact is derived from the cumulateness of our efforts in studying a particular phenomenon of managerial significance.

### Beyond the Published Article

Getting the article accepted is certainly a validation of research efforts and scholarly acuity, but, nowadays,

impact requires more follow-up effort. I have seen researchers adopting different approaches to dissemination with the goal of gaining visibility and traction for their research efforts. With the proliferation of journals, there is a fundamental shift in how research output is consumed. With a shift from physical copies to digital formats and emailed Tables of Contents, our attention has become diffused across digital outlets such that students and scholars today do more query-based searches in databases than spotting trends by

**TABLE 2**  
**Editorials (2014–2016)**

Topical Focus	Motivation	Authors
Big data	Opportunities for new theories and practices that big data might bring about. Explores its conceptual foundations and avenues for future research.	George, Haas, and Pentland (2014)
Climate change	Climate change and responses to it will fundamentally reshape many of the phenomena, interactions, and relationships that are of central concern to management scholars. Offers a brief primer on the science and implications of climate change, before exploring avenues for research and engagement.	Howard-Grenville et al. (2014)
Aging populations	Highlights the importance of the aging workforce and encourages research to equip executives and policymakers of the demographic challenges and opportunities to redefine our work environments.	Kulik et al. (2014)
Purpose	Business is often seen as a consumer of trust rather than as a generator of trust. Explores how organizations with purpose can positively transform society.	Hollensbe, Wookey, Loughlin, George, and Nichols (2014)
Governance	Provides an overview of governance research and points to open questions. Despite the considerable opportunity for further research, the advances in this stream also shed light on the limits and challenges of dominant scholarly approaches to the topic of governance.	Tihanyi, Graffin, and George (2014)
Design	Integrates design thinking principles into management. The lens provided by design thinking might be applied to elements within the management domain—within the roles of process re-engineering, workflow, the workplace itself, and the design of organizations.	Gruber, Leon, George, and Thompson (2015)
Asia	Special Research Forum that develops the case that “East” implies very different, and indeed a great variety of, contexts for organizations and individuals, in terms of institutions, philosophies, and cultures, and correspondingly different management practices as well.	Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, and Tsui (2015)
Digital money	Dematerialization of economic transactions using digital money, and its social and managerial implications.	Dodgson et al. (2015)
Information, attention, and decision making	Explores how management in the information age potentially differs and challenges our existing theoretical frameworks and assumptions. Thematic issue addresses the rapidly evolving opportunities and challenges of managing in information-rich contexts and sets the stage for scholarly research on information, attention, and decision making.	van Knippenberg, Dahlander, Haas, and George (2015)
Risk and resilience	Why do some organizations and societies successfully adjust and even thrive amid adversity while others fail to do so? Calls for research on the role and functioning of organizations during adverse natural or social events.	van der Vegt et al. (2015)
Gender diversity	Thematic issue on gender reflects on publishing actionable gender research, analyzes trends, and situates research in the transformative agenda to end gender inequality and discrimination.	Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, and George (2015)
Natural resources	Provides an overview of research in management of natural resources. Provides examples of how natural resource scarcity is challenging businesses, governments, and industries at large to innovate technologies and business models, compete in natural resource markets, and collaborate across industrial, national, and cultural boundaries.	George, Schillebeeckx, and Liak (2015)
Reputation and status	Thematic issue on reputation and status. Expands the role of social evaluation in management research.	George, Dahlander, Graffin, and Sim (2016)

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

Topical Focus	Motivation	Authors
Africa	The African continent as a source for research to inform and develop new management theories and practices.	George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, and Tihanyi (2016)
Corporate social responsibility	Thematic issue to showcase exemplars of how corporate social responsibility research is being more broadly construed and conceptualized. Provides an overview of research published in <i>AMJ</i> over nearly six decades.	Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, and George (2016)
Digital workforce	Explores how the prevalence of technology influences the way that people approach work. Considers how the competencies developed by digital natives and digital immigrants, referred to as the “digital workforce,” may benefit the organizations in which they work and how the increasing use of technology may influence identity development and patterns of relating within organizations.	Colbert et al. (2016)
Qualitative methods in grand challenges	Grand challenges require novel ideas and unconventional approaches to tackle their complex and evolving mix of technical and social elements. Focuses on how inductive methods such as theory building from cases, interpretivist studies, and ethnography can powerfully address grand challenges while also developing strong and insightful theory.	Eisenhardt, Graebner, and Sonenshein (2016)
Big data and data science methods	“Big data” refer to large and varied data that can be collected and managed, whereas “data science” develops models that capture, visualize, and analyze the underlying patterns in the data. Addresses both the collection and handling of big data and the analytical tools provided by data science for management scholars.	George, Osinga, Lavie, and Scott (2016)
Grand challenges	This Special Research Forum is a culmination of the current editorial team’s efforts to encourage research on societal problems with the aspiration that more management scholars would join global efforts at understanding and solving persistent, but tractable, grand challenges. Provides a framework for future research.	George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, and Tihanyi (this issue)

reading widely across topics and theories, as we were previously socialized to do in doctoral programs.

Even if we take *AMJ*, the number of articles published annually has increased from 54 to 90 articles over the past six years. Other journals see similar trends in increasing the number of articles and issues to meet the increasing global demand for journal space as business schools emphasize research-based impact. Getting attention for our work has become a challenge if we believe that impact comes from a broader consumption of our work. Researchers routinely send personalized emails to scholars whose work they have cited, and bring to attention specific contributions. Others use social media quite effectively to get their ideas noticed by scholars and managers alike. Business schools also actively promote faculty research through outlets such as alumni magazines, video recordings, and news coverage. These activities have a clear benefit—its gets the work noticed, and perhaps generates follow-through

opportunities to make a difference to practice or policy. With an emphasis on impact, these promotional efforts within the academic community and beyond are now commonplace.

*AMJ* has responded to these changes with the new “Dynamic Edition” introduced in 2015. Authors are now asked to provide media (audio or video) that can be integrated directly into the articles themselves. Some authors have shared radio interviews, or have used this opportunity to reflect on why they picked a particular method or data sample. These media files and web pages are embedded into versions that are easily read on mobile devices and tablets. Perhaps, our expectations of our research have changed—we see an *AMJ* article as a foundation stone, and we build on it by adding different avenues for dissemination. It may no longer be the “end game” to publish in *AMJ*, but, rather, to have impact with our research, which starts with the published page. At the end of the day, most of us, as scholars,

generate impact from our work through teaching, integrating our research insights into teaching through executive, undergraduate, postgraduate, and lifelong learning programs. Some translate their work through books, textbooks, or case studies. The unsurprising realization is that our research is no longer the only criterion, even if it remains crucial, that defines the impact we have in our universities and communities.

### The Changing Mindset in Business Schools

By serving as a dean of a growing business school, I am beginning to appreciate the inherent challenges in such an institution's financial model and the investment needed to support research. As universities face increasing pressure to show "value for money," research becomes a soft target for budgetary constraints, and often because much of our research is not perceived as having a direct impact on policies and practices. Government agencies funding our universities now routinely tie "at risk" funds to research impact. Business school accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) have now revised their standards with impact at the core of business schools' missions. Though, as a professional, applied field, I would argue that management has always had a wide-ranging impact, from entrepreneurship to human resources and strategy to public policy. The *Journal* has always been innovative in reaching out to new audiences and finding better ways to disseminate research findings—and is becoming even more so.

Groups of scholars and agencies are also coming together to highlight this shift, and call for research with impact. For example, the Responsible Science in Business and Management project is a grassroots effort by an interdisciplinary team of 24 leading scholars in 23 universities from ten countries. They are in the disciplines of accounting, finance, management, marketing, and operations, and supported by three global institutions (AACSB, EFMD, and United Nations Global Compact). This group forms a "community for responsible science," the mission of which is to propose a vision of business schools' research in service of society. The community is in the process of finalizing a white paper that outlines a set of principles of responsible science, and intends to develop a set of actions for each of the stakeholders comprising the research ecosystem so that business school research will contribute to knowledge useful for addressing the most pressing problems of the

world, living up to the idea that business is a force of good for society. Such efforts highlight the changing mindset in business schools of moving toward research with impact, and showing evidence of having had impact on business and society.

As a community of scholars, we need to celebrate the impact of our research. As evidenced by articles in this issue and others, as well as sampling some of the broader frameworks and practices inspired by work that has appeared in this journal's pages, we are tackling problems of fundamental organizational and societal importance. Our collective efforts at dissemination have improved vastly over the past decade as we consider innovative ways to get the attention of scholars and practitioners alike. Yet, this marks the beginning of a trend under which progress in our field will not just be about publications, but about outcomes and impact. We have more distance to cover in this regard, but, as a retiring editor, I am heartened to see widespread efforts at making our research rigorous and relevant, novel and significant, as well as understandable and actionable.

### THE 20th TEAM SIGNING OFF

The 20th editorial team is pleased to complete its service to the field and the members of the Academy. The *Journal* is in great shape—we now receive more than 1,300 new submissions a year, of which roughly 8% are finally accepted. Yet, the contribution of the journal is measured not only in the works that it prints, but also in the constructive and developmental reviews provided to all its submissions by the team of 18 associate editors and 300 editorial review board members. When revisions are included in the count of manuscripts handled, the team processed more than 1,600 manuscripts annually, with an impressive 55-day turnaround on average. During this team's tenure, we took the number of manuscripts published in a single issue from 12 to 15 by building upon the previous editorial team's effort. Considering the combined six-year period (2010–2016), the number of articles appearing in each issue has grown from 9 to 15 (66% growth), while our two-year Impact Factor has improved from 5.25 to 6.23. In addition, we have been working with the Academy's publications team to champion innovations in the *AMJ* "dynamic format" with embedded multimedia, and in positioning *AMJ* articles for mainstream press consumption. As we approach its 60th year, *AMJ* is vibrant.

The credit for such stellar performance rests with the Academy's membership: the 19,000 members



who read, and are occasionally inspired by, the *Journal's* pages; the scholars who choose to submit their best works to *AMJ*; the reviewers and editors who help to make it sharper, insightful, and engaging; and the professional staff who support its efficient operations. It is entirely befitting to acknowledge the commitment and effort of each associate editor—they have written at least one decision letter each week for the past 156 weeks. The team includes Amy Colbert, Linus Dahlander, Scott Graffin, Marc Gruber, Martine Haas, Elaine Hollensbe, Jennifer Howard-Grenville, Aparna Joshi, Carol Kulik, Dovev Lavie, Brent Scott, Scott Sonenshein, Riki Takeuchi, Laszlo Tihanyi, Gerben van der Vegt, Daan van Knippenberg, and Heli Wang. As an editor, I have been privileged to work with some of the best minds and the most gracious colleagues, who made this role that much more enjoyable.

*AMJ's* managing editor, Michael Malgrande, who remains the thread that connects one team to another, and does so seamlessly, deserves full credit for the effective functioning of the journal. I am grateful to Susan Zaid and John Pescatore from the Academy's publications team, as well as my editorial assistant, Hannah Webb, who together, have made this team deliver to its potential and helped the *Journal* become more innovative in its strategy and outreach. Finally, I would not have had the opportunity to serve as the 20th editor had it not been for Jason Colquitt, from whom I learnt a great deal, and who remains one of my best friends. While I take credit for operational efficiency, much of that foundation was put in place by Colquitt and his team, and the 18 teams before. The *Journal's* editorship now moves to Jason Shaw, who leads an exceptionally talented and globally diverse team. I am confident that, under Shaw's stewardship, the 21st team will be stellar in serving the evolving needs of the Academy's members. Once again, to all who make *AMJ* the leading empirical journal in management, thank you!

**Gerard George**

Editor, *Academy of Management Journal*

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