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In search of the impactful and the interesting: Swings of the pendulum?

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JMS50 Editors' Reflection:

'In Search of the Impactful and the Interesting – Swings of the Pendulum?'

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Abstract

In this article we reflect on our time as editors of *JMS* during the period 2003-2009. First we describe the context as we saw it on assuming editorship of the Journal and the actions that we took to improve the quality of scholarship published in the journal in order to set *JMS* on the trajectory to become a world-leading Journal. We articulate our view of what quality means in this context and observe that we eschewed the US-Europe divide. Rather, to be publishable, all papers had to meet the highest standards relative to their epistemological assumptions. Finally, we address two important challenges facing the Journal, and indeed management research in general, and consider what they mean for the future of *JMS*, notably in relation to open access publishing and to provide greater practical relevance. We conclude that the latter represents a swing of the pendulum towards the kinds of papers published in the early years of *JMS* but that recent developments in *JMS* provide new conceptual frameworks and empirical methods that contribute to enhanced insights for practice.

We are delighted to be contributing to this issue celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *JMS*'s establishment. *JMS* is 'in rude health'. It is a flourishing journal with a growing number of submissions (902 in 2011 from 242 in 2002), a strong international reputation (ISI citation ranking of 10th in Management and 5th in Business in 2011 and 2012) and an ever-expanding reviewer community (now numbering over 2000). Articles are increasingly cited in leading management journals, reflecting and adding to the growing prestige of the journal (Simsek, Heavey and Jansen, 2012). The Journal has also broadened its impact with a notable increase in the number of citations to *JMS* articles in strategy, entrepreneurship, innovation, corporate governance, business ethics and innovation journals (Simsek et al., 2012). The citation impact of *JMS* articles has also diffused internationally, notably in North America and Europe, and more recently, in Asia.

In the first part of this essay, we describe the context as we saw it on assuming editorship of the Journal and the actions that we took to further strengthen the Journal's position. The goal of these efforts was to improve the quality of scholarship published in the journal. In the next

section, we articulate our view of what quality means in the context of editing JMS. In the final section, we address two important challenges facing the Journal and consider what they mean for the future of JMS.

THE CONTEXT

When we took over as General Editors, JMS had a reputation as a leading general management journal, as reflected in questionnaire studies of leading academics (e.g., Coe and Weinstock, 1984; Extejt and Smith, 1990; Doyle and Arthurs, 1995). The journal's impact, however, had waned. In 2001, its citation ranking on the ISI Management list stood at 30th. Shortly after taking on our editorial roles we conducted an extensive review of the Journal's strengths and weaknesses together with the Editorial Board, authors, reviewers and members of the broad academic community. This process led us to recognize that attitudes toward publishing were changing significantly. Critical was an increased focus on a smaller cluster of 'top' journals for first submission, measured in terms of impact factors, and the consequent importance of the 'management' of metrics such as citation counts and impact factors that are required to elevate a journal into that 'top' journal group. The use of citation counts as a measure of quality had long been the practice in North America. However, the diffusion of research evaluation exercises such as the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK (now termed the Research Excellence Framework) and similar exercises in other countries (e.g., the Excellence in Research for Australia Initiative), as well as the use of journal lists in MBA rankings, helped contribute to the greater use of citation counts as a measure of quality elsewhere. Ease of access to articles' citation counts through search engines such as Google Scholar and Harzing's Publish or Perish software (<http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm>) also helped accelerate this trend toward citation-based rankings of journals, articles and authors.

Our review identified a range of factors that needed to be actively managed to ensure the Journal maintained its position as a leading international outlet for business and management research. These included reinforcing the Journal's epistemological openness, building a developmental and timely review system, ensuring that the length of time between papers being accepted and published was minimised and paying attention to the Journal's citation ranking. In light of this and our own analysis, we set about putting in place a number of changes, which we believed would help secure the reputation of JMS.

SECURING THE JOURNAL'S REPUTATION

The lifeblood of any journal is the continuing submission of manuscripts that are considered to be high quality, novel and that make a significant contribution to advancing understanding of the subject. If the number of quality manuscripts submitted falls, then the reputation of a journal suffers. This is particularly pronounced for a Journal such as JMS since it is not attached to a large discipline-based learned society from which it can draw both manuscripts and reputation. In this position, the journal needs to engage with the broad range of disciplinary areas that constitute business and management. To a large extent JMS's reputation is based on the multiple perceptions that exist within a disparate range of sub-disciplinary areas. Being perceived as a valid and high quality outlet by a wide range of academic communities is therefore critical.

As we have noted elsewhere and reiterate here, our approach was to reaffirm JMS's long-standing tradition as a broad-based journal without epistemological bias (Lockett, 1977; Clark and Wright, 2009). One of the first actions we took was to work with Geoff Easton to reinvigorate the charitable organization that provided the academic governance for the Journal – the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS). We wanted to

make ourselves accountable. We hence developed a series of standard reports on the Journal's performance that were considered at each Council meeting. In addition, to prevent the appearance or reality of "editorial capture," which would reduce the journal's broad appeal, the SAMS Council instituted a limit of two three-year terms for General Editors and adopted the practice of open recruitment and selection of all editorial positions.

We took a number of editorial steps to remedy the perception that JMS had narrowed in its focus. First, we signalled our intentions to strengthen and broaden the journal in an initial editorial (Clark and Wright, 2003) and reasserted this stance in a subsequent editorial essay (Clark, Floyd and Wright, 2006) as well as repeating it at conference presentations. Echoing the articulation of its original mission, we wanted to flag the openness of the Journal to a broader range of work. Second, to support this broadening of the Journal's intellectual base, we replaced the Editorial Advisory Board of 12 that had been in place for many years with a larger and more active board. We took care to ensure that the full range of interests across the management discipline was represented. Indeed, we attended a number of discipline specific conferences to encourage submissions, solicit feedback and recruit Editorial Board members. We also introduced twice-yearly editorial board meetings (at the British Academy of Management and Academy of Management annual conferences) to encourage direct interaction between editorial board members and ourselves. Third, we took steps to raise the international profile of the Journal by appointing an editor from North America (Steven Floyd) as well as Editorial Board Members from a wide range of countries. We asked the new Board Members to be the Journal's ambassadors to their respective national communities by promoting the Journal at key disciplinary events, running sessions on the journal, identifying possible submissions and building the reviewer community. We extend our sincere thanks to the Members of the editorial board for all the constructive support they gave us and their valuable contribution to the work of shaping the direction of JMS.

Fourth, we sought ways to reinforce both the perception and reality of a level playing field for all papers from whatever conceptual or empirical perspective. Part of this was to introduce a process whereby an additional editor, besides the action editor, read and commented upon a paper as it neared publication. Recognising that authors would be frustrated at receiving a new review at a late stage in the review process, the second editor's comments were communicated through the action editor. The action editor was free to draw on these comments, as they felt best. As an editorial team we viewed this developmental procedure to be a particularly important innovation aimed at ensuring a consistent level of quality for accepted papers across a broad range of topic areas. It enabled the editors to obtain a perspective across areas that they would not normally have handled and provided another set of comments aimed at bringing out a paper's full potential. From an author's point of view, the process also helped instil a degree of fairness and consistency.

Fifth, in order to (re)attract papers from scholars who had perhaps disengaged from the journal because of slow decision making, we brought the review process up to the performance standards of leading international journals. We worked hard to ensure timely reviews and provide developmental editorial letters. We recognised that not only was timely review critical to authors but also that positive word-of-mouth reports about the quality of the review process would have an immediate effect on the reputation of the Journal. It was also one of our objectives to build the community of JMS scholars. Part of this process involved connecting authors with previous papers that related specifically to their work. The inattentiveness of authors to relevant prior papers in the Journal or elsewhere was quite a surprise to us and may have been related to a lack of familiarity with the Journal's contribution to particular debates. We believe that pointing authors to such relevant work in the Journal, and in other journals, is an important part of the editorial role that is tending to get lost in the recent legitimate concerns about citation coercion

<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/suppl/2012/2/01/335.6068.542.DC1/1212540.Wilhite.SOM.pdf>.

We also cultivated an extensive base of referees who would provide quality reviews commensurate with the quality of the journal. We warmly thank these many reviewers for their contributions and for giving their time so generously. Encouraging good reviewers to review for the Journal became increasingly challenging, a problem faced by other journals too. To help ameliorate this problem we increased further the size of the editorial board, especially to incorporate strong emerging scholars, and initiated an annual best reviewer prize.

A key part of the effort to provide quality service to authors and reviewers was the formation of a reconfigured administrative office, initially with the appointment of Jo Brudenell as Editorial Manager and subsequently with the addition of Margaret Turner. This enabled JMS to professionalize its office systems and to present a user-friendly access and personalized interface to our community. We deliberately eschewed an automated submission and review system in order to maintain a welcoming point of contact for our authors and reviewers.

We also believed that reviewers were a valuable resource to the journal and sought to avoid overloading them with articles that they themselves would not send out for review. We therefore tightened the threshold at which articles were put into the review process with a consequent increase in the desk rejection rate. We also sought to develop a reviewing process that was as developmental for reviewers as for authors. We sent them copies of other reviewers' comments together with the editorial letter regardless of whether a paper was rejected or invited as a revision. Our intention was to guarantee that reviewers had the opportunity to read all the information the Editors received so that they could understand both the editor's decision and the views of their peers with respect to the article.

Sixth, without being too formulaic about the presentation of papers, we introduced clear expectations about what needed to be included in a manuscript. On becoming editors, it was quite a shock to see empirical papers without a clear method section, for example. An important early decision was to send papers back to authors if key parts of a paper were absent.

Seventh, we aimed to reinforce the reputation of JMS by commissioning provocative special issues and introducing the Point-Counterpoint section that focused on opening up new areas outside the mainstream. This feature was followed later by the addition of review papers. Both of these have attracted considerable interest among the readership. Zahra, Sapienza and Davidsson's (2006) review of entrepreneurship and dynamic capabilities, for example, has become one of the Journal's most cited and downloaded articles.

Eighth, we took the view that we had a responsibility to see that people in the discipline read the journal and were aware of articles that might relate to their research. Apart from printing the contents of forthcoming issues on the back cover of every issue, accepted articles were made available through the Wiley Blackwell Early View service. Finally, we invited special issue editors and authors to identify individuals to whom reprints should be sent, saw to it that back issues of the Journal were digitised in order to make the full content of the Journal electronically available, and selected certain articles to be made freely available to the whole community, regardless of whether people had a subscription. The success of these actions is evidenced by the considerable growth in electronic downloads of articles. Since 2003 this increased more than fourfold from 181,520 to 735,325 full-text downloads in 2011.

Quality of Content

In recent years, and a trend that seemed to be accentuated during our period of tenure, the conceptual and empirical threshold for publication in leading management journals has increased substantially. Part of this is due simply to the increasing numbers of people attempting to publish and the limited number of pages in top journals. As editors, we realized that both authors wishing to publish in the Journal and ourselves as editors had to “up our game” if JMS was to be considered again as a leading international outlet for management research. This meant insisting that papers were well motivated, rigorously executed and produced a contribution to theory.

Of course, attempting to raise the international profile opened us up to the charge of becoming a “US journal”. We recognized the substantive and stylistic differences in research coming out of alternative epistemological positions, however, and made a special effort to apply decision-making criteria that were appropriate to the paper at hand. Thus, for example, we continued to accept papers using grounded theory and ethnographic methods and projects with a critical perspective. But to be publishable, all papers had to meet the highest standards relative to their epistemological assumptions. The breadth and depth of the Editorial Board was crucial in upholding such criteria and helping authors produce a manuscript that crossed this quality threshold. In moving the Journal to the highest international standards, we eschewed the US-Europe divide that seemed to preoccupy many of our colleagues (Baum, 2011; Lampel, 2011; Davidsson, 2012).

Leaving aside the questionable notion that “European” research is in some way homogenous, labelling our attempt to raise the quality threshold as US-centric misses the point. To take the UK context as an example, we would argue that too few UK business school academics were submitting to and publishing in leading US-based (but international) journals and that the journals they were publishing in, such as JMS at the time, were not competing with these journals in terms of quality. Indeed, Saunders et al. (2011) show that UK academics are

under-represented in the world's leading journals. Part of what we and our successors have been trying to do, therefore, is to make JMS one of the world's leading journals, and in so doing, provide UK and European authors especially, but increasingly from elsewhere, with a "first choice" submission portal for their best research.

Both then and now, it seems to us that the heart of the matter is the question of what constitutes high quality social science research. Laments about the so-called 'physics envy' problem and quantitative research (often accompanied by distaste or even paranoia about economics-based management research) among some management scholars are for us unconvincing. From our experience in editing JMS, there is no reason that qualitative and interpretive research should be exempt from rigorous standards – standards that are appropriate within the relevant domain. A similar issue has been identified in respect of entrepreneurship research by Davidsson (2012). The solution to seeing better research published, regardless of domain, lies in better training across all areas and methods. The Journal itself has sought to contribute to educating the field by commissioning review papers on methodological topics (e.g. Bluhm, Harman, Lee & Mitchell (2011) on qualitative research).

Research training and mentoring vary considerably both within and between geographical regions. Even within some developed contexts, we have formed the impression that unsatisfactory practices are being perpetuated to the next generation. Much remains to be done to bring management research from all geographies up to the standards of other social science disciplines. During our period of editorship we witnessed a growing influx of papers from economically less developed regions where it was clear that authors were not familiar with JMS. Many of these submissions also evidenced lack of rigorous research training. Yet, the situation is changing rapidly. One has only to attend conferences like the International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR) or the Asia Academy of

Management (AAoM) to see the extent and level of advanced management research in Asia. Well-trained and energetic researchers in some developing country contexts are beginning to overtake more complacent colleagues in established contexts.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

In addition to continuing to raise standards, management research faces two challenges that have significant implications for the future of JMS and indeed other leading journals. Both are rooted in changes within the Journal's institutional environment.

Open Access

A first key issue that editors and publishers will have to grapple with is challenges to the traditional journal publishing model. Typically, publishers charge institutions and individuals for access to the content of journals. This covers the costs of the editorial process (editors' honorariums, administrative costs, peer-review), publishing the journal (marketing, printing, editorial work) and provides an income to the publisher and a revenue stream to learned societies. The current "pay-to-read" model is predicated on the digitized content of academic journals being protected behind pay walls linked to subscriptions (Mabe, 2012).

However, Open Access (OA), defined as the 'unrestricted online access to articles published in scholarly journals' (Laakso et al. 2011) is challenging this model. The number of open access journals has grown exponentially in the last decade. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) currently contains just under 9,000 journals and lists 294 open access journals in business and management (checked in April 2013). The pressures to open up access to journal content are intensifying. These relate to the "serials crisis" (the price of journal subscriptions rising faster than library budgets), the ease of access to journal content afforded by the development of the internet, publishers combining journals into large

electronically accessible bundles (“big deals”) and a view that the outputs of publically funded research should be freely available to tax payers. This latter point was stressed in a speech by the Minister of State for Universities and Science in England – David Willetts:

‘We need to have far more research material freely available, and we need to be better at editing and sorting it... Our starting point is very simple... public access to publicly-funded research results. That is where both technology and contemporary culture are taking us. It is how we can maximise the value and impact generated by our excellent research base. As taxpayers put their money towards intellectual enquiry, they cannot be barred from then accessing it. They should not be kept outside with their noses pressed to the window – whilst, inside, the academic community produces research in an exclusive space’ (<http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-public-access-to-research>)ⁱ.

Two open access models are commonly distinguished. Gold OA refers to an article, once it has been reviewed and accepted for publication, being made freely available. Some journals operate Gold OA via a “pay-to-publish” model (Mabe, 2012) by levying an Article Processing Charge (APC) whilst many others operate Gold OA without charging authors a publication fee. With regard to the latter group of journals, around 11,500 OA journals support free OA by using the free publications software available from Open Journal Systems (<http://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/>)ⁱⁱ. Some journals operate a hybrid model whereby, depending on the proportion of content covered by APCs, journal content will have different levels of free accessibility. Some articles will still be accessible only via a paid subscription. Laasko et al. (2011) calculate that between 2000 and 2009 the number of Gold OA journals increased by 645%, and the number of articles in these journals increased by 983%. They estimate, depending on the database used (ISI, Scopus or Ulrich’s), that the share of Gold OA articles

as a percentage of all scholarly articles published in 2009 is between 5.9% and 7.7% (for other estimates see Björk et al. 2010; Laasko and Bjork, 2012; McVeigh, 2004).

The other form of open access is referred to as Green OA. This is where authors self-archive their work by depositing the final version (i.e., the version of record) of their paper into a freely available repository of some kind whether it be institutional, a website or subject-based. This approach to OA is supported by a journal either permitting an article to be made accessible in a repository at the same time as publication or having a short embargo period that specifies the time before an article can be made available in a repositoryⁱⁱⁱ. Björk et al. (2010) estimate that in 2008 11.9% of all scholarly articles were available through some form of Green OA.

What might developments in open access mean for a journal such as JMS and business and management journals more broadly? While some high prestige journals have traditionally also been high cost, within the broad academic and university community there is a growing intolerance to rising journal subscription. This is leading more university libraries to consider pulling out of the “big deals” and focusing resources on highly accessed journals. There are also calls for academics to boycott publishers that resist open access (<http://thecostofknowledge.com/>), and institutions are encouraging their faculty to move away from high cost journals and consider publishing in low cost or free open access journals (see for example, <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k77982&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup143448>). If these movements gain traction and start to influence attitudes more broadly, then they have the potential to change how individual academics perceive journals and to shift their willingness to submit and review. The PLoS (Public Library of Science) Journals are perhaps an example of such a trend in a range of subjects in sciences.

As we have already stated, the essence of a journal's reputation is the quality of both the manuscripts submitted and the review process. No journal has an immutable right to maintain its status or an exclusive right to reviewers who provide their services for free. The reputation of a journal is fragile and it can change within a short period of time.

Consequently the composition of the 'top' tier of journals in business and management can change dramatically if the prerequisites that underpin the reputations of these journals shift.

If academics and institutions begin to take even greater account of the cost of journal subscriptions and public funders of research insist on the ease of access to the outputs of work they fund, then academics may turn away from journals that they and the disciplinary/funding community perceive as expensive and unnecessarily restrictive. The reputation of such journals may fall, as will their impact scores, and prestige transferred to other, perhaps completely new titles. However, the speed of such trends will vary across disciplines in part because of differences in the penetration of open access journals and the extent of dependence on public funding bodies to support research projects (although governments may tie open access to receipt of certain funds). For these reasons, despite the apparent large number of open access journals in business and management, they are currently more prevalent in Science subjects and have yet to make significant inroads into social science and arts and humanities.

Given the impact of Science policy on academia in general, developments in these disciplines may well presage the future of publishing in the social sciences. With the pressures that come from demonstrating relevance and the increasing need to attract funding for research projects, business and management is not immune to these trends. Editors, and the learned societies that own journals in business and management, will need to be sensitive to changes in the broader publishing environment and how these impact on the shifting reputation of journals. They need to be mindful of sensitivities that attach to the price of their journal and

the extent of access to the contents. They need to engage more proactively with their publishers to ensure that subscription rates and access policies are carefully monitored and in harmony with perceptions of the community at large. Furthermore, they need to become more accountable and be prepared to justify their pricing and access policies to their authors and reviewers.

In some respects, JMS has already embraced the open access movement by making selected content freely accessible. Typically at least one issue a year is made available for free, as are review articles and point-counterpoint discussions. Although JMS informally operates a hybrid model (some content is made available to all), it may have to formalize greater access if it wishes to avoid losing high quality submissions from research funded by public research bodies to journals that make content freely available. The Editors of JMS, in conjunction with Wiley Blackwell, will therefore have to consider establishing an appropriate charge on those who wish to make their articles freely available. This will have to take into account the ability of individual academics, institutions and funders to pay these fees.

The development of institutional and subject-based repositories (e.g., *ArXiv* in Physics, RePEc (Research Papers in Economics), SSRN (Social Science Research Network)) introduces potential complementarities as well as threats to traditional journals. As Laasko et al. (2011) note ‘having equal visibility to both publisher-provided copies and copies uploaded either to repositories or other web sites is a completely new dynamic in the traditionally dyadic relationship between journal and its potential reader’ (p. 2). In addition, the development of powerful general and subject-specific collation services and search engines will make access to Green OA material much easier. Google Scholar already provides a powerful search engine that can locate freely accessible copies of articles.

This development is likely to have at least two potential impacts on JMS. First, on the upside there is some, albeit mixed, evidence that making pre-publication copies of articles available

with no restrictions but linked to subscriptions increases citations (Lawrence, 2001; Craig et al., 2007). The open availability of these articles makes them easier to access, read and accumulate citations more quickly. Our experience as Editors supports this view in that the use of Early View and ensuring that certain articles and issues were openly accessible for particular communities supported the rise in citation score and ranking of the journal. We would actively encourage the future Editors of JMS as well as other Journals to focus on making the content even more accessible since this benefits the community and, in our experience, the Journal.

There are a number of potentially very significant downsides to the emergence of repositories. First, if authors are required to upload their work onto these repositories prior to submission to a journal^{iv}, maintaining an anonymous review process will be impossible. Giving up on blind review may also have benefits (e.g. accelerating the development of a paper), but without it, the role of the editorial process as a gate-keeper and upholder of quality may be compromised. Second, uploading work onto repositories prior to submission poses potential challenges regarding the traditional notion of the ethics of attempting to publish a paper in a leading journal when it has previously been published elsewhere. Third, repositories will challenge the traditional model of publishing articles as a collection in a volume and undo the mental habit of associating articles with a journal. Electronic publication already obviates the need for such aggregations. Readers can access material via Early View, or other similar services, with the consequence that the content of a journal can be updated quite rapidly once an article is accepted for publication. Furthermore, electronic table of contents (etoc) alerts actively encourage readers to access material electronically rather than via paper copies in libraries. Libraries themselves are reducing their paper-based holdings of journals dramatically.

One possible consequence of the dis-association of articles from journals is that the name of the journal may diminish in its readers' perceptions. Content increasingly will be accessed based on an article's relevance to someone's research interests rather than on its appearance in a particular journal. Journals may become reviewing systems feeding their output into large searchable databases. These may well parallel, or even be incorporated into, the huge digital media stores where consumers increasingly search for titles often without being aware of the volume title or identity of the publisher. This trend has the potential to shift reputational attributions from the journal to the database, perhaps with the database even setting reviewing standards for the journals that comprise it. An over-arching editorial board could assure the multiple review systems operated by the journals within a database/repository. Were this to happen, repositories rather than journals would be tiered and drive submission behaviour. Ultimately, one can see this leading to the withering away of journals, as we know them.

If readers can access the content of a Journal free via institutional or other repositories, then the financial model of JMS and other subscription-based journals is under threat, as is that for the learned societies that support and benefit from scholarly journals. Charging fees for publication is unlikely to replace the income from subscriptions. The Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings, chaired by Dame Janet Finch, reported that Gold OA journals currently charge an average APC of £1,500 to £2,000 (Finch Report, 2012, p. 61). Subsequent to this report and the publication of the Research Councils UK Policy on Access to Research Outputs, many publishers have set their APCs at around \$2,000, although as Martin (2013) reports, the current cost of publishing an article may be higher than this level of fee. Whether authors or institutions will be able to afford this level of fee, or higher levels for those journals seeking to retain their current subscription income by charging a proportional fee to each article published, is unclear unless the costs are offset

in some way^v. However, such fees are being built into research grants so that funders are obliged to pay for the OA they are requiring.

Another possibility is that the nature and perception of what journal subscriptions pay for will change. Currently subscriptions are seen to pay for access to content. Given the importance that journal publication plays in promotion and tenure decisions, however, perhaps Universities and other funders will recognize the value added in the evaluation of quality provided by the peer review and publication process. Currently, subscription revenues support a complex and devolved quality assurance system upon which Universities rely. In the future subscriptions may be tied more to the evaluation and visibility provided by the review and publication process. Subscription costs may therefore be based on how many times scholars from a particular institution draw on the review and editorial resources of a journal. Further, while we eschewed further incentivizing reviewers by providing payment, this is an area for debate in the changing publishing landscape. If reviewing is viewed as part of a quality assurance system for universities, and not simply an altruistic endeavour associated with enhancing a particular field, the case for paying reviewers may be strengthened. This suggests that future editors of the journal should be seeking to enhance the review process since it is accessibility to this that may drive the income of the Journal.

Challenges to business schools and opportunities for management research

The second challenge facing journals like JMS relates more to the generation of content than its distribution and therefore is perhaps even more significant. There have been long standing debates about ‘whether the academy matters’ (e.g. Hambrick, 1994), but business schools and management researchers are now facing closer scrutiny from a radically changed stance by governments and universities who are coming to view teaching as the priority. In 2011, the

Minister for Universities and Science in England criticised business school academics for publishing in ‘obscure US journals’: ‘It’s not clear that rewarding our leading academics in business schools for producing research is in the long term interests of the performance of business...’. In US business schools, where up to 80 per cent of research is funded from declining internal sources (such as executive education) and where public funding for institutions has been dramatically reduced, perquisites such as reduced teaching loads for research and summer grants to faculty have come under pressure and many doctoral programs have been curtailed or even eliminated (<http://www.aacsb.edu/dfc/DFC-ES-final.pdf>). Simultaneously, students and parents, whose tuition and fee payments have been increasing dramatically, are demanding higher quality teaching and greater access to professors’ time.

This fiscal and social disinvestment in research reflects a flawed understanding of its purpose, which is to provide a more objective, relentlessly questioning analysis of important questions in business and management than, say, consulting (Zahra and Wright, 2011). At the heart of the intellectual endeavour is a view that the ‘drive towards understanding can never accept an arbitrary stopping-point, and critique may always in principle reveal that any currently accepted stopping-point is ultimately arbitrary’ (Collini, 2012, p. 55). Focusing on ‘practical’ teaching at the expense of research could be counter-productive because it undermines the process by which classroom knowledge is generated and advanced and the very conditionality of understanding means that we can never tell whether knowledge ‘has passed from the useful to the useless’ (Collini, 2012, p. 55), or the other way round. As we know from the strategy literature, competitive advantage is not achieved by doing what everyone else is doing.

If business schools are to provide ‘quality,’ practical business engagement and produce the kind of impact expected by policymakers, the question is: Where is this material to come

from? Too much emphasis on practical aspects without developing analytical thinking based on latest research may mean that, like generals stuck with the strategies that won an earlier war, the skills needed to arrive at solutions to new problems that arise in future will not be developed (Wright et al., 2012). Further, the current protracted crisis environment has highlighted the importance of “speaking truth to power” (Wildavsky, 1979), that is to provide honest and objective advice – a role that academic research can play to help firms avoid the pursuit of short-term competitive advantage that has detrimental longer term effects.

Yet the body of recent management research that speaks to relevant managerial problems has had little impact on practice, tending to be ignored in the media (Wensley, 2011). It is perhaps not too surprising that papers published in regular academic journals, as opposed to more applied journals, attract only a modicum of wider attention given their general inaccessibility to practitioners and the potential mismatch in the timing of practitioner/policy interest and the developmental cycles of the research process. However, it is feasible to garner wider awareness of journal-based research and during our tenure we aimed to promote this where possible. For example, we published articles on bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), regulatory uncertainty (Hoffman et al., 2009) and the future of business schools (Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) that attracted wide interest in the popular press.

We suggest that not all management research published in leading management journals has to pass the double hurdle of relevance and rigor. Nor does all management research have to be ‘pure’ and abstract. Nor is all relevant research necessarily conservative or all abstract research necessarily radical, indeed it may be quite reactionary and sterile.

Some of those who were arguing most fervently for Mode 2 research (i.e., context-driven, problem-focused research involving multidisciplinary teams working on specific practical problems, in contrast to Mode 1 research which is academic, investigator-initiated and discipline-based knowledge production) now seem to have [partially] recanted by observing

that the case was overstated (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011:360). Bartunek (2011) comments on the difficulties and paucity of Mode 2 research and that Mode 2 research is often judged by Mode 1 standards. Mode 2 research trades notions of objectivity and rigor for access and richness of data and narrative in the research. But unless it at least achieves some threshold of rigour, the lessons for practice are dubious. If the purpose of academic research is to consider long term pay-offs, then imagining new theories for which the practical application is not yet evident would seem to fit squarely in this role. After all ‘there is nothing so practical as a good theory’ (Lewin, 1951).

It remains important that academic journals like JMS have rigorous criteria for the research they publish. That business might rely on research that has not been subject to such scrutiny is a cause for grave concern. As editors of JMS we received large numbers of papers, often based on consultancy projects, where the underlying research was deeply flawed. Among such flawed but relevant research we would include studies, typically conducted without control samples, identifying ‘best practice’. Such studies may be fashionable and have ‘impact’ but they are at best misleading and often times plain wrong. ‘Thinking practitioners’ want reassurance that the research they commission is robust. Indeed, Baldrige, Floyd and Markoczy (2004) show that practitioners and academics want essentially the same thing when it comes to management research – solid justification for knowledge claims (rigor, evidence) and interestingness (novelty -- “tell me something I don’t know”). The problem is that practitioners do not necessarily see our journals as producing such knowledge – they do not understand or agree with what academics mean by rigor. Something that may be ‘theoretically new’ may not be new in the world of practice. Lack of engagement with practice means that this novelty, or lack of it, is not recognized by academics.

While business school academics have responded to national research assessment exercises and schools' tenure incentives and often appear to have shied away from engaging with practice, such involvement would enable them to address more interesting research questions that will help in publishing in top journals. Changing incentives to engage with practice will likely have a similar impact on shifting behaviour. The issue then is to ensure that research in leading journals is informed by and informs practice in a virtuous but imperfect circle that really will address the impact agenda.

For articles to be interesting and impactful, we are of the view that they need to include concepts and advance theory. Interestingness helps focus the field on important phenomena as well as on addressing gaps in theoretical knowledge. Interesting papers may also play a role in serving practice. Interestingness is also a major influence on the likely impact of an article. Impactful papers fill a need for evidence based-management knowledge (Bartunek, 2011). This approach links to JMS' original aims and objectives.

In light of current debates it seems that we are witnessing a swing of the pendulum at the levels of both what is considered to be a university and what is considered to be leading management research. With respect to universities, there probably never was a golden age of university independence from external societal forces (Collini, 2012). Recent policy debates herald a shift in the purpose of universities back towards earlier periods rather than an entirely new departure (Martin, 2012). Such a swing of the pendulum presents opportunities, not just threats.

With respect to management research, these pressures are contributing to a swing towards a practical focus but with greater rigor that presents opportunities for new research agendas. Research in the areas of strategy as practice (Floyd et al., 2011; Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) and into the microfoundations and microprocesses of strategy (Barney et al., 2011; Felin et al., 2012) seem to us to be promising avenues in this

direction. These developments focus on analysing what managers actually do and represent a further swing of the pendulum towards the kinds of papers published in the early years of JMS but with the new conceptual insights, frameworks and empirical methods that characterized papers published in the most recent decade in JMS.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have shown, the role of the Editor extends beyond managing the review and publication decision-making process. If Journals are to retain their reputations and maintain their pivotal role in the publishing ecology, Editors must actively engage with the international academic community, publishers, learned societies and policy makers as well as navigate their way through differing perceptions of their journal within their discipline and the broader issues that beset the community. This aspect of the Editor's role is particularly important because the focus on and importance of the standing of a Journal is perhaps greater now than at any other time. Not only is this information freely available in different citation rankings and journal quality lists, but it is also incorporated into assessments of business school programmes and national assessments of departments. Consequently, journal reputation drives submission patterns.

Maintaining the reputation and standing of a journal is therefore not simply a matter of self-interest for Editors but matters to the authors who publish within it and whose work will be assessed in terms of the journals in which they publish. It also matters to particular discipline areas because the standing of their journals is a proxy measure of the reputation of that discipline. Finally, it matters nationally because if the quality of journals edited within a particular country rises then this in turn can have spillover effects on national research assessment exercises. As we have suggested, maintaining the quality of the review process,

ensuring the transparency of decision-making, securing the commitment of a journal community, and making sure the content is accessible and read are all critical ingredients of a journal's reputation.

In terms of JMS, more could always be done. From the perspective of attracting more authors who seek to publish their best work in the Journal, further progress could be made to securing JMS's position as an A journal on tenure lists in more and more leading schools. However, inertia in the system suggests that this is a long-term effort. Nevertheless, our successors' achievement in seeing JMS a constituent journal on the *Financial Times* list is, in our view, an important step along this road.

More generally, more could be done to disseminate the insights in papers published in JMS to a wider audience beyond management. The imbalances in the import and export of papers between management and other disciplines such as finance, economics, political science, psychology and sociology are well known. The broad scope of JMS suggests that it ought to be well-placed to have a greater impact upon other disciplines (Simsek et al., 2012).

In this article, we have set out our personal reflections on how we sought to strengthen the reputation of JMS by undertaking a number of interrelated actions to improve the quality of scholarship published, while maintaining a broad-based journal without epistemological bias. We also identified major challenges facing JMS and other academic journals concerning the growth of open access publishing and changing policy stances towards universities in general and business schools in particular. Improved governance and avoidance of editorial capture seem to us to be particularly germane in creating the framework to enable quality research to continue to be published and in facilitating the adaptability of management journals to their changing environment.

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ⁱ This imperative underpins Research Councils UK’s (which are part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in which David Willetts is a Minister) Policy on Open Access initially published in July 2012 (see <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/RCUKOpenAccessPolicy.pdf>).

ⁱⁱ We are grateful to Fred Friend for highlighting a broader definition of Gold OA that goes beyond the more restricted “pay-to-publish” model.

ⁱⁱⁱ Both the National Institutes of Health Public Access Policy (see <http://publicaccess.nih.gov/>) in the US and Research Councils UK Policy on Open Access support Green OA by setting a maximum embargo period of twelve months.

^{iv} Presently the complexity of submission inhibits many authors from submitting their work to repositories. Nevertheless, they have become a key part of the publication system in some disciplines (e.g., Physics and Economics).

^v The development of OA is forcing Journals, learned societies and publishers to examine their cost base and consider more cost-effective publications process and systems.