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Timothy Adrian Robert CLARK

Singapore Management University, timothyclark@smu.edu.sg

Mike WRIGHT

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So, Farewell Then ...Reflections on Editing the Journal of Management Studies

Timothy Clark; Mike Wright

Durham Business School; Nottingham University Business School

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‘Don't send me no more letters, no ...’ Bob Dylan, Desolation Row.

This issue of *Journal of Management Studies (JMS)* marks the end of our term of office as General Editors of the Journal. In the six years it has been a considerable privilege to follow in the footsteps of the distinguished previous editors and work with Joep Cornelissen and Steve Floyd (the other General Editors), Andrew Corbett, Colin Hales, and Andrew Delios (our Associate Editors), Brad Jackson (Reviews Editor), the Members of our Editorial Board, the Members of the Council of the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS) that provides a governance structure for the Journal, our colleagues at Wiley-Blackwell and all the authors and reviewers of the manuscripts we have edited during this period. Our particular thanks are reserved for Jo Brudenell and Margaret Turner who respectively manage and service the Editorial Office. Apart from keeping us fully informed about the status of all manuscripts for which we had responsibility to ensure timely decisions, their ‘personal touch’ in all their dealings with authors and reviewers has been a crucial part of building, extending and maintaining a vibrant *JMS* community which now numbers around 9000 people.

On becoming General Editors at the beginning of 2003 our aim was to build upon the traditional strengths and distinctive ethos of the Journal established by the previous editors, to whom we owe an enormous debt, and so ensure the Journal's continuing pre-eminent standing within the international business and management community. We placed particular emphasis on enhancing *JMS*'s long-standing, but sometimes forgotten, tradition as an independent, broad based management journal of international standing that attaches no priority to either the subjects of study or the theoretical and methodological approach adopted. Like our predecessors, our concern has been to ensure that *JMS* avoids ‘being taken over by any one approach to management studies at the expense of others’ (Legge, 1998, p. U1).

The fact that the Journal is relatively autonomous, in that it is not part of a large and well-established membership-based society that actively supports the importance of research and its dissemination, is both an advantage and disadvantage when pursuing this broad objective. The Journal is free of the need to bend to and reflect the emerging policy concerns of a particular body that inevitably occurs as the priorities of different constituencies rise and fall. In this respect the Journal is able to remain consistently broader by developing and signalling the importance of a wide range of intellectual areas. At the same time, it does not have a ready-made community who regularly receive and read the Journal and view it as a conventional outlet for their work. Given that authors can submit their papers to an ever increasing range of journals, securing a regular flow of high quality manuscripts was therefore critical to ensuring the long-term viability and reputation of the Journal (see also Baruch et al., 2008).

To achieve our broad objective we instigated the following:

- Widening the intellectual base of the Journal by reconnecting with a whole range of communities that had developed their own specialist outlets or no longer viewed the Journal as a natural 'home'. At the same time, we emphasized that we wanted to continue to maintain a strong flow of contributions from existing communities of interest. To encourage this, our aim has been to develop a review process, regardless of topic, that ensures that those papers which are published are theoretically grounded and the methodological approach is appropriate to the particular research question. We particularly wanted to continue the *JMS* tradition of being a preferred leading outlet for qualitative research. Given our intention to encourage diversity, reviewers' judgements of papers are based on the highest standards of whichever theoretical and/or empirical paradigm the authors chose to adopt. This has been underpinned by developing a cadre of reviewers who shared the same perspective on the mission of the journal and were able to identify papers that had the greatest likelihood of making a contribution.
- Improved service to both authors and reviewers, which included a shift to an electronic manuscript submission and review process via email, more detailed decision letters, more timely turnaround of reviews and the dissemination of reviewers' comments to all reviewers of a paper (Clark et al., 2006). Decision letters are individually written and synthesize the key points from reviewers, demonstrate that the editor has read the paper and provide clear informed developmental guidance to authors regarding how to strengthen the paper further and clarify and elevate the contribution, whether our editorial decision was to revise or reject.
- To be fair to authors, and in line with practice in other leading journals (e.g. De Nisi, 2008), we adopted a developmental rather than 'post box' editorial policy which meant that in reaching a decision we did not just 'count the votes' but carefully considered the three sets of reviewers' comments alongside our own reading of the paper. Despite evidence to the contrary, we found that often the essence of reviewers' comments can be quite similar even if their recommendations are different.
- Given that editors and reviewers can make mistakes we established an appeal process where a third party (another editor and/or Editorial Board member) would read all the correspondence and reviews on a paper and make a recommendation to which we and the author were bound. In the vast majority of the few cases where appeals have been made we have been able to discuss issues and sources of misunderstandings directly with authors and agree a way forward.

- Appointment of a broader, more international and active Editorial Board (currently comprising 127 members) that has a range of expertise that reflects the diversity of the field and its ever-changing dynamics.
- Holding regular meetings, open to all Editorial Board members, such as at the Academy of Management, British Academy of Management, EGOS and other conferences. These meetings provide a useful forum for us as editors to receive feedback and suggestions from our Editorial Board members in relation to existing focus and practice as well as developments in the field and how best the Journal could respond to these.
- Adopting a more strategic focus on the selection and management of special issues to ensure the topics/themes represented cutting edge advances in the subject area and that articles published within them were of equivalent quality to those published in 'normal' issues.
- Inaugurating: (1) a new debates section entitled 'Point–Counterpoint' with a rapid turnaround in order to promote lively discussions about contemporary issues; (2) a new literature review section featuring reviews of newly emerging important areas in management; (3) a new Book Review section featuring composite reviews of important books. Whilst the first two have served their intended purposes well, we felt that the last has been less successful and have decided to discontinue it as from next year.
- Establishing a biennial *JMS* conference. The first took place in 2006 and was on the topic of 'Beyond Knowledge Management: Advancing the Organizational Knowledge Research Agenda'. The second was held in September 2008 and was titled 'Trajectories, Paths, Patterns and Practices of Strategizing and Organizing'.
- Publically recognizing the critical contribution of authors and reviewers by introducing Prizes for Best Paper and Best Reviewer. The first were awarded in 2005. In addition we now print the names of all reviewers in Issue 3 of each Volume.
- Contributing to regular 'meet the editor' sessions at leading international management conferences and publishing workshops to communicate the ethos of *JMS* to new and emerging scholars.

The Journal has seen a 392 per cent increase in manuscript submissions to regular issues over the past six years, from 242 in 2002 to 618 in 2007 (Table I). This put an increasing pressure on us and so over a period of years we have increased the editorial team from two in 2003 to six today.

Table I. *JMS* trends in submissions and impact, 2002–07

	<i>Number of submissions</i>	<i>% Increase over previous year</i>	<i>Impact factor</i>	<i>Ranking in ISI Business list</i>	<i>Ranking in ISI Management list</i>
2002	242	0.41	0.856	24/54	27/65
2003	342	41.3	1.104	21/57	26/67
2004	438	28.1	1.180	16/57	19/67
2005	538	22.8	1.326	15/61	18/71
2006	508	−5.5	2.00	11/64	11/78
2007	618	21.7	1.926	10/72	16/81

Over the past six years, *JMS*'s impact factor has increased from 0.856 to 1.926, and the Journal's ranking has risen from 24th to 10th in the Business list and from 27th to 16th in the Management list (see Table I).

Although we recognize that the broad standing of a journal within an academic community is the result of a range of inter-related factors, during our tenure as General Editors not only have the ISI Web of Knowledge™ journal rankings assumed even greater significance but so have a range of newly-emerged Journal lists (Ashkanasay, 2007). There are, for example, attempts to develop national journal lists in Australia (Australian Business Deans Council), France (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique – CNRS) and the UK (Association of Business Schools). The European Science Foundation has developed an ‘initial’ journal list for Humanities – the European Reference Index for Humanities (ERIH) – and is presently discussing the possibility of such a list for the Social Sciences. This list is based on the principle that it can be used to assess the quality and impact of science in Member countries and so is intended as a cross-national standardized benchmark for research quality. In addition, a number of publications, such as *Business Week* and the *Financial Times*, have developed their own lists of journals in order to assess the research quality of faculty as part of their assessment of School programmes. As a consequence of these developments, editors now have to be aware of a range of rankings that all draw on impact factors but use different methodologies to determine the broad standing of journals within the business and management community. The community's control over such assessments is gradually lessening. A corollary to these trends is the diminishing freedom of researchers to choose the outlets for their research. As we noted in an earlier editorial (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.’ As institutional and individual factors increasingly overlap there is a tendency for authors to narrow the field of journals to which they initially submit their article. Consequently, submission rates, desk rejection rates and overall rejection rates in ‘top tier’ journals have increased (Judge et al., 2007; Monastersky, 2005). If journal lists increasingly drive the choices of where researchers submit their manuscripts then this presents challenges to how editors manage a journal.

The point is that the lifeblood of any journal is the regular submission of high quality manuscripts that have the potential to make significant advances to thinking within a field. If manuscripts dry up, a journal atrophies and dies. If journal editors are to maintain a flow of high quality manuscripts, not only do they need to establish a manuscript review process that is ‘customer-focused’ by being prompt and developmental whatever the outcome, they also need to ensure that the Journal is being read and articles

are being cited since citations underpin the position of a Journal in the different rankings referred to earlier. The latter can no longer be left to happenstance since being perceived as second or third tier lessens the chances of attracting a continuous flow of manuscripts, whatever the quality.

With this in mind, since the beginning of 2003 we have overseen a number of important changes that have sought to enhance the dissemination of papers published in *JMS*. Papers are now published more quickly. The average time from acceptance of a paper to its publication in the hard copy of the Journal is now below one year. The contents of the next two issues are printed on the back cover of every issue and articles are made available through OnlineEarly. This means that papers can be accessed well in advance of the hard copy of the Journal appearing, thus quickening their circulation within relevant research communities and so increasing their chances of citation. In conjunction with Wiley-Blackwell we have also sought to increase electronic access to the Journal. Every volume since its inaugural issue has now been digitized with the consequence that the full content of the Journal is now available. Widening electronic access to the Journal has had a dramatic impact on the downloading of articles. Since 2003 this has increased by 241 per cent with 383,441 downloads in 2007. Furthermore, in the near future all authors will be able select a number of people to whom a pdf of their paper will automatically be sent. Authors and reviewers already receive a pdf of the article they have written or reviewed. We also send copies of Special Issues to up to 50 individuals identified by the Special Issue Editors as having a major interest in the theme of the issue. By substantially increasing the access and visibility of work published in the Journal we hope to partially address a point made by Glick et al. (2007, p. 821) that ‘99.26 per cent of our research efforts do not have a major impact on the field’.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The international scope of submissions to *JMS* continues to broaden (see Table II). Some important changes are especially worth noting. Although the number of submissions from the UK increased by a quarter from 2003 to 2007, their share of overall submissions fell quite markedly. The number of submissions from the USA and Canada almost doubled while their share of all submissions rose only slightly. Submissions from continental Europe more than doubled and are now the largest regional source. Submissions from Asia increased almost two and half times, with their share of submissions also increasing markedly.

Given the importance of international submissions, we have developed the Editorial Team and the Editorial Board over the last six years to reflect this diversity. Two general editors are based in the UK (one of continental European origin) and one is based in continental Europe (of US origin). Among the associate editors, one is based in the UK, one in the USA and one in Asia (of Canadian/UK origin). At the

time of writing, the Editorial Board includes eight members from the Asia-Pacific region (plus others with Asian origins based in the USA), and 16 based in continental Europe (plus others with European origins based in the USA). The scope of the Editorial Board was also increased to reflect the wide subject range of submissions, including areas where submissions were increasing, such as entrepreneurship, innovation and knowledge, and corporate social responsibility.

Table II. Countries and areas of origin for submissions to *JMS* in 2003–07

<i>Country</i>	<i>2003</i>		<i>2004</i>		<i>2005</i>		<i>2006</i>		<i>2007</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
UK	105	30.7	118	26.9	151	28.1	94	18.6	132	21.4
USA and Canada	82	24.0	112	25.6	136	25.3	108	21.4	156	25.2
Continental Europe	82	24.0	96	21.9	131	24.4	145	28.7	180	29.1
Asia	44	12.9	83	19.0	85	15.8	113	22.4	104	16.8
Australia and New Zealand	27	7.9	21	4.8	24	4.5	30	5.9	31	5.0
Rest of World	2	0.5	8	1.8	10	1.9	15	3.0	15	2.5
Total number of submissions	342	100.0	438	100.0	537	100.0	505	100.0	618	100.0

CHALLENGES

Whilst these hard figures indicate some of the changes and developments that have been made since 2003, they tell us little about the challenges we see in producing and publishing impactful research. Given the reasserted ethos of *JMS*, we sought to publish papers that are theoretically grounded and where the methodological approach is appropriate to the particular research question. As such, we held no a priori standard position on what these might constitute. Papers were judged on the highest standards of whichever theoretical and/or empirical paradigm they chose to adopt and these were determined in large part by the reviewers as subject experts in the domain and method relevant to a particular paper.

The management field in general has witnessed a major improvement in the quality of contributions in recent years. We placed considerable importance on *JMS* contributing to this sea change in the field. Through our review and active editorial processes we sought to raise the threshold both of theoretical contributions and of the methodological rigour of papers published in *JMS*. Indeed, a number of the Point–Counterpoint sections have been devoted to methodological issues (see, e.g. Echambi et al., 2006; Shah and Corley, 2006).

Yet, as we noted above, while we, along with many other journals have witnessed a proliferation of articles submitted, it is hard to conclude that this has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in papers that add significantly to the discipline. More is being produced but the big impact papers remain elusive. It is unclear to what extent this has arisen because the management discipline is becoming more like normal science, or whether it is down to weak paradigms, or whether it is a function of the audit and incentive system that are proliferating. The emphasis on improving the rigour of theorizing and of empirical method, which was needed, may have led to more incremental research questions being addressed.

The impact of the audit culture and incentive system is likely to affect the extent to which both junior faculty and, somewhat surprisingly, highly competent senior faculty (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006) engage in consensus-challenging research. The emphasis on ‘gap filling’ seems to assume that we know what the boundaries of a field look like and tends to dissuade examination of new areas outside this matrix.

As we noted above, the development of incentive systems that over-emphasize publication in a limited set of so-called ‘top-tier’ journals, almost to the exclusion of much else, may lead to other important and deleterious shifts in behaviour that impact publishing behaviour. For example, authors may be dissuaded from submitting to second tier journals or from writing research monographs, with the consequence that important avenues for research dissemination which support well-cited output may wither. Given the limited publishing capacity of these top-tier journals and the fact that lower tier journals also publish high impact articles (Starbuck, 2005), this may serve to hamper the development and dissemination of potentially important knowledge. Furthermore, if authors simply give up on pursuing papers that have been rejected within this group of journals then, as Glick et al. (2007) point out, the field will be characterized by a high exit rate. Hollenbeck and Mannor (2007) counter this argument by encouraging young academics to maintain high levels of activity and resilience and not to focus ‘narrow-mindedly on a single work that takes over 5 years to write in the hopes of creating a classic’ (p. 941). As they conclude:

... analyses of papers that turned out to be classics in terms of citation counts suggest that the authors viewed these works as regular parts of a larger program of research, not discontinuous experiences that were divorced from steady streams of published articles ... even if one defines success in terms of generating a citation classic, the best approach is to be active and resilient, and constantly working on improving your true score through professional developmental experiences. ... (pp. 941–2)

A further issue associated with shifts in the incentive system is that they may have led to a reluctance to engage with practice/policy through consultancy and advice. As a result, many researchers may be locked

into a closed loop of the existing literature. Historically, *JMS* placed considerable emphasis upon the relevance and application of research findings for practice. Indeed, from its inception the aims of the Journal stated that it was ‘designed to contribute to the advance of knowledge directly related to the practice of management’, and this was reasserted by subsequent editors (Legge and Lockett, 1990; Lockett, 1977). In recent years, much of this seems to have disappeared. The rigour-relevance debate has, however, re-emphasized the need for papers to devote attention to considering the implications of their findings for practice but this remains a major challenge (Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009; Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Starkey et al., 2009).

Perhaps more fundamentally, engagement with practice may contribute to the observation of empirical regularities or puzzles that challenge existing theory and whose explanation opens the way for the development of novel theory (see Cornelissen and Floyd, 2009).

Such theory may be multi-disciplinary. Developing multi-disciplinary research in the pursuit of explaining complex observed puzzles may be a more fruitful means to generate significant insights than seeking to find gaps in existing theories. This may be a way for management to develop its own theories rather than relying on other disciplines or fields. While there is a continuing and lively debate about the role of multi- or inter-disciplinary research, as a forthcoming Point–Counterpoint in *JMS* shows (Markoczy and Deeds, 2009; Zahra and Newey, 2009), we believe that the view expressed some 30 years ago by one of our predecessors still holds good:

Business school academics, perhaps more than conventional discipline specialists, I think, have the obligation to tackle organizational problems from a multi-disciplinary standpoint – precisely because problems do not come in neat discipline specific packages. (Legge, 1977, p. 230)

In closing, it has been an honour and a privilege to edit *JMS* for this brief period of its long life. Six years would seem to us to be an optimal period to edit such a major journal as *JMS*, for the sakes of both the Journal and ourselves. We have also immensely enjoyed working with our editorial colleagues to whom we now pass on the baton. No doubt our successors will and should reassess the approach we have taken and the changes we have made in order to maintain the Journal's standing and vibrancy. We wish them every success.

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