

FROM THE EDITORS

PUBLISHING IN *AMJ* FOR NON-U.S. AUTHORS

Opportunities for scholarship that can enrich organization and management theory and practice in global contexts abound. Given a growing emphasis on high-visibility research in non-U.S. business schools, the *Academy of Management Journal* is now receiving more submissions from international authors than ever before. During research processes, experience with publishing in the *Journal* is often passed on through training and socialization with colleagues and scholars. In the absence of such experience, non-U.S. authors who aspire to publish in these pages are likely to find the “rules of the game” opaque, or at best, tacit. When authors face this opacity burden, their articles are more likely to be desk-rejected or rejected after review.

The “From the Editors” (FTEs) published in a seven-part series starting with the February 2011 issue provide comprehensive coverage of what editors, reviewers, and readers expect in an article published in this journal. These notes provide helpful guidance on managing topic choice and the research and writing process to effectively convey a novel theoretical and empirical contribution. Yet in addition to concerns about the common challenges to successful publishing, non-U.S. authors express unique concerns that are not typically voiced by U.S.-based authors. The goal here is to articulate common pitfalls that can be avoided, so that interesting research opportunities available to international scholars can more easily reach *AMJ* to enrich and enliven scholarly discourse. From discussions shared with editorial colleagues, review board members, and successful and rejected authors in *AMJ*, a collective set of thoughts has emerged on the unique reasons for which manuscripts from non-U.S. authors may get filtered out before and during the review process. These reasons for rejection broadly fit into three categories: *framing and contribution*, *theory and method*, and *presentation*. Below, I look at each of these issues in turn with the goal of understanding reasons for rejection associated with them and how these liabilities might be avoided in future submissions.

FRAMING AND CONTRIBUTION: THE QUESTION AND WHY IT MATTERS

Often non-U.S. authors send manuscripts to *AMJ* believing that having international data automati-

cally qualifies their research as interesting; that confidence is often misplaced. First, many of the desk-rejected papers involve what can be called “construct in country” questions. For instance, the research question is framed as understanding an existing well-established construct in a different country—say, for example, organizational identity in Brazilian firms. Though there could be prescriptive value in understanding how organizational identity as a construct operates in Brazil, this value does not automatically translate to a framing that is meaningful to *AMJ*’s global readership because the underlying theory and hypotheses are the same as they have been in research in other settings; only the context has changed. If the context did fundamentally challenge assumptions about organizational identity, then the empirical testing would need to account for that difference, and due care should be taken to explain how the variability in the setting helps highlight a different facet or boundary condition of the construct being examined. Thus, in a *construct in country* paper, the theory is not novel. Given that *AMJ* emphasizes causal theory more than descriptive context, the lack of new theory hampers such a submission’s chances of success. Non-U.S. authors need to overcome this framing challenge to see their work published in high-impact journals. Useful exemplars include Farh, Zhong, and Organ (2004) on organizational citizenship behavior in China; and both George, McGahan, and Prabhu (2012) and Mair, Marti, and Ventresca (2012), who used different theoretical approaches to study socially inclusive innovation in less developed countries.

A second reason for desk rejection is what can be classified as “comparative country” questions. In these manuscripts, the authors frame the question as identifying descriptive differences between two countries but use well-established constructs and theories. This framing is more interesting than the first, but it still might not pass the threshold for consideration. Variance across countries is helpful. Yet, unless a theoretical framing explains why differences exist and challenges the boundary conditions or contingencies posited in existing theories, comparative framing of a research question does not appear as a strong contribution to readers and reviewers alike. The challenge here is that the gap

itself could be minimal or one not worth filling, but receiving a desk rejection is attributed, often wrongly, to poor writing or a North American bias. Further, the country context might be immaterial to the question being examined, but the authors introduce unnecessary complexity by inadequately explaining why the country context would change the underlying theoretical or causal assumptions. Some helpful articles for comparative framing that introduce new theory or challenge underlying assumptions include Spector and colleagues' (2002) 24-nation study on work locus of control and well-being, and Kirkman and Shapiro (2001) on cultural values and their impact on satisfaction and commitment.

Authors can avoid the framing and contribution-related reasons for desk rejections by addressing them at the design phase or before sending a manuscript for review. FTEs by the current editorial team are particularly relevant and helpful. Non-U.S. authors would benefit from addressing grand challenges when choosing a topic (see the June 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 54: 432–435]) or setting the hook to attract and maintain reader attention (see the October 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 53: 873–879]). Both these FTEs explain succinctly some techniques that will shift an overt emphasis on country context to a more interesting theoretical question or problem-oriented framing. Often, the framing challenge distills down to striking a balance between the contextual richness afforded by international data and reader appeal. The reality is that international data don't automatically transform a manuscript into a good contribution. As in mystery novels, it is the framing of an unresolved and interesting problem that holds the key to reader attention. The data certainly add to the intrigue, but do not create excitement and anticipation by themselves.

THEORY AND METHOD: ARGUMENT AND HOW TO TEST IT

The second category of reasons for rejection is that a submission's theory is underdeveloped or that the research design does not adequately allow testing the arguments put forward. Put differently, the framing oversells and the research design underdelivers. Here again, common patterns can be observed among non-U.S. submissions that *AMJ* has rejected. First, "theory development by citation" is likely the most common reason for rejection in this category. It may be that authors often state an explicit goal of developing theory, and heavily cite existing literature, but are unaware of what constitutes theory development. In many of these manu-

scripts, causal reasoning and well-grounded hypothesis statements are conspicuously lacking. There is a difference between citing articles and engaging prior research, as well as a difference between citations used for support and citations used for grounding the explanatory logic behind hypotheses (see the December 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 54: 1098–1102]). In decision letters, editors often write that articles make a theoretical contribution by either building theory or testing theory. What's important is that they change, challenge, or fundamentally advance knowledge of the concepts, relationships, models, or theories embedded in the relevant literatures. In this way, they stimulate thought about some organizational phenomenon in a way that would not normally be anticipated from extrapolations of existing work, thereby advancing future work in an important and useful way.

Second, "research design limitations" is another area in which non-U.S. authors often struggle. Study designs so flawed that the reviewers will not accept the manuscripts' limitations fall into this category. One example of fatally flawed research design is using cross-sectional data to test an essentially longitudinal or temporally sensitive argument. In some studies, there is an obvious mismatch between study question and the research design. Other prevalent reasons include inappropriate sampling procedures or substantial data attrition problems—for instance, theorizing about the effects of strategy on the survival and performance of firms but collecting longitudinal data only on firms that survived (and inadvertently excluding those that failed). Although this error may sound eminently avoidable, the ground reality is that secondary data availability and access are severely restricted in many countries. Unfortunately, the problem of sampling and data restrictions impose limits on the types of studies that non-U.S. authors can conduct with *AMJ* as a target journal. To this end, reviewers understand and are willing to accommodate imperfect but interesting data, though there is more headroom for improvement here. Helpfully, many of these sampling, measurement, operationalization, and modeling requirements that need to be accounted for are described in previous editorials (see the August 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 54: 657–660]). To pass the threshold for publication, a manuscript needs to have a research design that matches a compelling research question.

As those who collect data in non-U.S. settings are acutely aware, secondary data availability remains a challenge. Consequently, manuscripts that resort to "qualitative theory testing" often get desk-rejected.

AMJ's promotion and support of qualitative data and research methods is significant. Two of the current editorial team's associate editors exclusively handle research using qualitative data from interviews and in-depth case studies. However, some manuscripts use interview data to confirm and test existing theory in a different country context. The problem here is that there is no new theory being offered and that testing existing well-established constructs using interview data makes for a weak contribution, even if it is in a different country context. The goal is to develop new theory using a diverse set of qualitative methods, which can challenge existing beliefs or theories (see the April 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 54: 233–237]). In fact, qualitative research methods provide an excellent opportunity for non-U.S. authors to overcome systemic secondary data constraints and adopt creative, nonconventional ways to make a rich contribution. It is no surprise then that those non-U.S. scholars who conduct rigorous qualitative research to build theory, rather than to test existing frameworks, find *AMJ* to be an attractive and supportive publication outlet.

PRESENTATION: CONVERSATIONS AND HOW WE CONVEY IT

It's not the English! True, English is a second language for most of us, but a good copy edit can transform a poorly written manuscript into readable and convincing prose. It may well be that English is your second language. If so, ScholarOne's AJE feature, which allows you to submit your manuscript to American Journal Editors for English-language copyediting, could be an option worth considering. This feature is available on the Author Dashboard of Manuscript Central, right below the link that you would use to submit a manuscript to *AMJ*. Many manuscripts are rejected, not because of the sometimes inelegant use of the English language, but because the authors do not follow "house style." Like all journals, *AMJ* has adopted a specific style for presenting content on its pages. This house style is reflected in the structure of presentation—the way the references are formatted, how the tables and figures are presented and laid out, and how certain sections such as data and methods are described. It is important to follow the house style because editors and reviewers alike expect content to be laid out in a certain way that they are used to seeing in the *Journal*, and it saves them time and effort because they know what to expect in a manuscript and where. Not adhering to the formatting requirements indicates that a submission is likely from a novice or a non-Academy

member; in either case, it doesn't help the submitting author in terms of reviewer confidence that the author has the capability or skill to successfully revise the manuscript for eventual acceptance. At its worst, it yields substandard reviews, because reviewers curtail their effort, because they believe that the authors did not take the review process seriously enough to invest their own effort in conforming to formatting requirements.

A second, but less obvious, element of house style is the way arguments are made and the "meta-structure" of how arguments are laid out. Though there is some variance in this regard, *AMJ* prefers a phenomenon-based framing with a theory-based explanation. For example, framing a study as addressing Chinese or Indian initial public offerings (IPOs) as a phenomenon is less appealing than framing it as addressing a specific theoretical problem that is then tested in IPOs of these countries. As discussed before, the IPOs or the country context itself is less important than a plausible rationale for why a theoretical problem, such as institutional voids, becomes relevant in given context. As an exception, studies using inductive or qualitative theory development exercises are likely to enjoy greater leeway and creative deviation from a meta-structure than typical quantitative studies using reasonably well-established theories. Both the house style and meta-structure of papers can be understood by reading a few of the *Journal's* published articles associated with your topic and theoretical lens.

Another area in which non-U.S. authors struggle is "lack of mutual knowledge" shared with the readers of their manuscripts. Lack of mutual knowledge triggers a lapse in communication between two parties as they fail to understand each other. There are two ways in which mutual knowledge is manifest. The first is in the literature that an author cites. If cited research is distant from what informed readers who take that theoretical lens know, then they have few tenets against which they can evaluate the arguments. Sometimes non-U.S. authors refer to in-press articles of niche journals, and by definition, reviewers are precluded from part of the conversation on which the author builds the causal logic. Though increasingly less so, some non-U.S. authors cite non-English-language articles or articles that are unavailable in online databases in their framing and theory development—a reader engagement strategy that isn't helpful in the case of those who have no mechanism to access that article.

In addition, mutual knowledge failures can also happen in the interpretation of findings and implications. Manuscripts are rejected on the grounds

that they offer limited contribution because authors fail to convince readers that the results reveal meaningful insights. If articles are seen as pieces in a larger conversation, then it behooves an author to present and convey the framing and findings in way that readers can relate to and build upon. Failure to develop a strong discussion and implications section runs the risk of losing readers because they did not see the results interpreted in a similar way. To avoid such problems, non-U.S. authors can benefit from editor notes that help improve crafting of papers (see the February 2011 *From the Editors* [vol. 55: 8–12]) and ways to discuss the implications of a study's findings (see the April 2012 *From the Editors* [vol. 55: 256–260]). In addition, working with scholars who have been successful in publishing their work in *AMJ* could help bridge the knowledge gap and reduce problems of presentation, among others. Alternatively, having experienced colleagues read and comment on a manuscript for fit, content, format, and style is likely to help avoid disappointing negative editorial decisions.

The intent here was to codify “tacit” elements behind desk rejects, but it is also relevant to note that mutual knowledge and mutual appreciation for scholarship are likely to come from stronger scholarly engagement outside the pages of this journal. Desk rejects based on *framing and contribution, theory and method, and presentation* can be avoided by soliciting and testing ideas before research is completed and a manuscript is drafted. If the publishing process is seen as capturing conversations, then engaging others through coauthorships, attendance in conferences, and submitting early drafts to paper development workshops are active first steps submitting authors can take to become involved in the conversation before attempting to transform it with a paper in the *Journal*.

GETTING PAST DESK REJECTS

With a shift in the center of gravity of the Academy eastwards, there will be correspondingly more submissions from aspiring authors who would like to enjoy their fair share of intellectual and physical space in the *Journal*, and rightly so. The process of getting into well-established conversations requires that the non-U.S. authors learn the language and rules of the game. This editorial provides some glimpses into common reasons for desk rejection. Although there are plenty of exciting research initiatives globally, non-U.S. authors have to invest in understanding the requirements of *AMJ*'s readership and the expectation of a theoretical contribu-

tion if they would like their work presented here. Learning *AMJ*'s language is also likely to give non-U.S. authors greater voice as they figure out how to translate interesting research questions and contextual richness into articles with strong theoretical contributions.

It is not only that *AMJ*'s editorial team would like to encourage and develop rigorous international submissions; the scholarly field of management *needs* it. The recent “From the Editors” series reflects the enthusiasm and commitment of the editorial team to improving the quality of submissions from new submitters and previously rejected ones—including non-U.S. authors. These notes capture the editorial team's collective insights into improving a manuscript's probability of success. As the number of non-U.S. Academy members increases, one could expect to see the *Journal*'s pages proportionately represent their contributions. There is still a fair mile to go to achieve this goal. The first step is to improve the average quality of submissions to give them a fighting chance.

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