FROM THE EDITORS:

PLAGIARISM POLICIES AND SCREENING AT AMJ

*Copy and paste.*

*Save as.*

Those two functions are used by scholars almost every time a word processor is launched. One instance when they should not be used, however, is when creating a new manuscript for submission to a scholarly journal. Aside from the References section and any direct quotes, the phrases and sentences in a new manuscript should be new and original—not taken from prior work by that author or other authors. The purpose of this *From the Editors* is to outline the new plagiarism policies at *AMJ* and to describe the procedures that the *Journal* is now using to screen for plagiarism. Scholars who craft new submissions by typing words onto a blank screen without using “copy and paste” or “save as”, and without explicitly attempting to mimic passages from prior work, need not attend all that closely to the contents of this editorial. Scholars who do habitually use such shortcuts should pay careful attention to these details, however.

Before describing the *Journal’s* plagiarism policies and practices, it is worth noting why *AMJ* is engaging in these efforts at this point in time. In a discussion of ethics and integrity in the publication process, Schminke (2009) recounted several conversations with journal editors, some of whom noted that plagiarism was discovered serendipitously, often by an observant reviewer. Those accounts closely match my own experiences as Editor of the *Journal* for the past two years. Four instances of plagiarism were uncovered before the practices described in this editorial were enacted, with a reviewer uncovering the issue in each of those cases. As described by Kacmar in a previous editorial (see the June 2009 *From the Editors* [vol. 52: 432-434]), such
instances violate the Academy of Management’s (AOM) Code of Ethics. The relevant passages from the Code read as follows (Academy of Management Code of Ethics, 2012):

4.2.1 Plagiarism

4.2.1.1 AOM members explicitly identify, credit, and reference the author of any data or material taken verbatim from written work, whether that work is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

4.2.1.2 AOM members explicitly cite others’ work and ideas, including their own, even if the work or ideas are not quoted verbatim or paraphrased. This standard applies whether the previous work is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

The AOM’s Ethics Committee, which is broadly charged with overseeing and supporting the Code, has initiated a number of efforts to address ethical violations such as plagiarism (for a review, see Bartunek, 2012). Those efforts include joining the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), a consortium created in 1997 by a group of British medical journal editors (COPE, 2012). Now with 7000 members worldwide from multiple academic fields, COPE provides guidelines to journal publishers and editors regarding ethical issues. The committee’s efforts also include a video series where journal editors were interviewed about ethical issues, with one installment focusing on plagiarism (Ethics Video Series, 2012). In December of 2011, the committee also sponsored an Ethics Summit--attended by members of the committee, journal editors, and the AOM publishing staff--that resulted in a set of guidelines for handling ethical issues in AOM publications. The policies and practices described below are inspired and informed by the COPE and AOM guidelines.

**WHAT CONSTITUTES PLAGIARISM AT *AMJ*?**

*AMJ’s* definition of “plagiarize” is taken from Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2012) and Plagiarism.org (Plagiarism.org, 2012): “to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.” Sometimes that existing source is a
paper written by another scholar and sometimes that existing source is a paper written by the author, him/herself. The latter circumstance constitutes self-plagiarism. Plagiarism most often takes the form of verbatim copying of passages from an existing source, but without the quotation marks and page numbers needed to convey proper attribution to the reader. However, plagiarism can also take the form of “close copying”, where passages are taken almost verbatim from the existing source, but changed slightly (Wager, 2011). Such “close copying” would be highly unlikely to emerge if the passages were written organically by the author, without direct and conscious mimicking of the existing source.

Although the definitional discussion above implies that plagiarism is either “present” or “absent” in a manuscript, the reality is that plagiarism cases vary in their severity. COPE provides guidelines for classifying the severity of plagiarism according to several dimensions. Those dimensions are adapted in Table 1 (Wager, 2011). Drawing on the table, plagiarism is less severe if only a few words or sentences are copied, if those words constitute widely used phrases appearing in the Method section, and if the source is cited (but not appropriately identified as a direct quotation). In contrast, plagiarism is more severe if whole paragraphs are copied in the literature review, hypothesis development, or theory building sections, and if the source is not cited (or is even excluded from the manuscript altogether). This latter case likely represents a clear intent to deceive on the part of the author.

HOW ARE MANUSCRIPTS SCREENED FOR PLAGIARISM AT AMJ?
Authors who submit manuscripts using *AMJ*’s Manuscript Central Author Dashboard are now greeted with the following warning:

As a matter of protocol, the Academy of Management runs all manuscripts through the CrossCheck system. CrossCheck is a powerful software tool on the AOM Manuscript Central publication platform that enables “screening” of submissions for matching text. CrossCheck screens all submissions to ensure the originality of written work by detecting overlapping and similar text in published and web-searchable manuscripts. CrossCheck performs this analysis by comparing submissions against its comparison database, which comprises more than 20 billion web pages. **Authors:** Please note that passages from your prior publications should not be “copied” and “re-used” in new submissions. Those words are now “owned” by the outlets that published them--they are no longer yours to use as you see fit. Any passages that overlap should be identified as direct quotes using appropriate citations and page numbers, otherwise they may constitute plagiarism. See the Academy’s [Code of Ethics](http://www.aomonline.org/ethics) and [Plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org) for more information. The best course of action is always to create new submissions completely from scratch, without using “copy and paste” or “save as...” sorts of shortcuts.

CrossCheck is a joint initiative between CrossRef, a consortium of publishers, and iThenticate, a leading provider of professional plagiarism detection technology (iThenticate, 2012). iThenticate was created by iParadigms, a company which is responsible for the Plagiarism.org site, along with products like Turnitin (for educators) and Writecheck (for students). CrossCheck calculates an “overall similarity index” for each submission, with the References excluded from that comparison. The system also creates a side-by-side report with overlapping text highlighted in one panel and clickable versions of potentially copied sources in the other panel. In addition to the CrossCheck notice on the Author Dashboard, submitters are asked to affirm the following before uploading their manuscript into the system:

Confirm that the words and passages in the manuscript are **new and original** and not copied from existing publications, including your own. Any direct quotations must be identified as such using appropriate citations and page numbers. All submissions will be screened using CrossCheck to determine overlap with published and web-searchable manuscripts. Please see the Academy’s [Code of Ethics](http://www.aomonline.org/ethics) and [Plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org) for more information.
In practice, no manuscript winds up with a 0% similarity index, as some level of “ambient overlap” is almost always present. Such “ambient overlap” results from specific scientific jargon, common “turns of phrase,” and the like. In cases where the similarity index winds up being unusually high, however, I perform a close examination of the CrossCheck report. If the plagiarism is extremely minor, a “desk edit” may be issued. Here the author is asked to remove the overlap before being allowed to continue with the review process. If the plagiarism is not so minor, however, an email inquiry is sent to the author informing him/her of the overlapping text and requesting an explanation of the issue. Since the CrossCheck screening began, most of the authors who have received this inquiry have responded by claiming ignorance of plagiarism definitions and standards, despite the CrossCheck warnings and required confirmation that the words and passages in the submission are new and original. Of course, the AOM Code of Ethics explicitly states that ignorance of the code is not a valid defense (Academy of Management, 2012):

5.1. Familiarity with the “Code of Ethics” AOM members have an obligation to be familiar with this “Code of Ethics.” Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of an ethical standard is not, in itself, a defense to a charge of unethical conduct.

Moreover, the Code applies to authors who submit to *AMJ* even if they are not registered members of the AOM. The Introduction of the Code notes (Academy of Management, 2012):

Nonmembers who participate in AOM activities (e.g., authors, job seekers, etc.) also agree to adhere to the enforced ethical standards and to abide by the rules and policies pertaining to the specific AOM activities they engage in.

Most of the plagiarism cases that have been serious enough to trigger an email inquiry to the authors have resulted in a “desk reject” of the submission. Unlike the “desk edit” mentioned above, a “desk reject” formally ends the review process for that manuscript. It should be noted
that the COPE guidelines suggest additional penalties for especially severe plagiarism cases, including (but not limited to) a banning of that author from future submissions to the journal for a particular time period (Wager, 2011). Although AMJ reserves the right to explore such penalties if warranted, the plagiarism cases observed so far have not tended to reach that level of severity.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this editorial is to inform, not to trigger anxiety on the part of well-intentioned authors. As noted at the outset, if authors create new submissions organically, without using “cut and paste” or “save as”, and without consciously attempting to mimic some existing source, the most that will occur is the sort of “ambient overlap” that is not viewed as problematic by the editorial team. That said, if authors are anxious about their manuscripts for any reason, one approach would be to put their submissions through Turnitin, which uses the same technology as CrossCheck (Turnitin, 2012). That analysis would either put fears to rest or highlight passages--perhaps created by a coauthor--that seem “too close for comfort.” Regardless, our goal is to ensure that all of the articles that join the scientific record through the pages of AMJ do so using phrases and sentences that are new and original.

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REFERENCES


## TABLE 1
Classifying the Severity of Plagiarism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Less Severity</th>
<th>More Severity</th>
<th>Most Severity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>A few words or sentences</td>
<td>Whole passages or paragraphs</td>
<td>Entire manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>Widely-used phrases</td>
<td>Phrases used by a small groups of scholars</td>
<td>Original phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning</td>
<td>Method section</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Hypothesis development or theory building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing</td>
<td>Source cited and included in References</td>
<td>Source not cited but included in References</td>
<td>Source omitted from manuscript altogether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>No clear intent to deceive</td>
<td>Some potential intent to deceive</td>
<td>Intent to deceive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{\text{a}}\) Adapted from Wager (2011).