

## FROM THE EDITORS

### PLAGIARISM POLICIES AND SCREENING AT *AMJ*

*Copy and paste.*  
*Save as.*

Those two functions are used by scholars almost every time they launch a word processor. One instance in which 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 the manuscript’s 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 I describe 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 likely to be 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, and a reviewer uncovered the issue in each of those cases. As Kacmar noted in a previous editorial (see the June 2009 “From the Editors” [vol. 52: 432–434]), such instances violate the Academy of Management’s (AOM’s) “Code of Ethics.” The relevant passages from the “Code” read as follows (Academy of Management, 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and reference the author of any data or material taken verbatim from written work, whether that work is published, unpublished, or electronically available.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 This standard applies whether the previous work is published, unpublished, or electronically available.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 7,000 members from multiple academic fields worldwide, COPE provides guidelines to journal publishers and editors regarding ethical issues. The committee’s efforts also include a video series, in which journal editors are interviewed about ethical issues, with one installment focusing on plagiarism (Ethics Video Series, 2012). In December 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,” taken from the Merriam-Webster (2012) online dictionary and Plagiarism.org (2012), is “to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.” Sometimes that “existing source” is a work written by another scholar, and sometimes it is a work 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,” wherein passages are taken almost verbatim from elsewhere but changed slightly (Wager, 2011). Such closely copied text would be highly unlikely to emerge if an author were writing passages organically, without direct and conscious mimicking of an existing work.

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 (Wager, 2011) for classifying the severity of plagiarism along several dimensions. Those dimensions are adapted in Table 1. According to the table, plagiarism is less severe if only a few words or sentences are copied, if those words constitute widely used phrases appearing in a manuscript’s Methods section, and if the source is cited (but not appropriately identified as directly quoted). In contrast, plagiarism is more severe if whole paragraphs are copied in a paper’s 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 and 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 that is responsible for the Plagiarism.org site, along with products such as Turnitin (for educators) and Writecheck (for students). CrossCheck calculates an “overall similarity index” for each submission, excluding the References 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 and 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. When the similarity index winds up being unusually high, however, I perform a close examination of the CrossCheck re-

TABLE 1  
Classifying the Severity of Plagiarism<sup>a</sup>

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

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from Wager (2011).

port. 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 e-mail 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 e-mail inquiry to authors have resulted in a “desk reject” of the submissions. 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) banning an author from future submissions to the affected 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 *AMJ*’s editorial team does not view as problematic. That said, if authors are anxious about their manuscripts for any reason, one approach they might take 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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