AMR Writing Theoretical Papers: A Workshop from the Editors

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Academy of Management Meeting
August 4-8, 2017
Atlanta, GA
Workshop Objectives

◆ Help participants write theoretical articles that make a contribution to the literature.

• Writing clear theory
  – Writing style, presentation and organization of theoretical manuscripts

• Making a theoretical contribution
  – Content and paths to making a contribution
  – Challenges and dilemmas in theory building
  – Ways to address these challenges
8:00-8:10: Introductory Comments: AMR mission
   • Belle Rose Ragins

8:10 – 8:40: Publishing In AMR: Pitfalls and Solutions
   • Cindy Devers

8:40- 10:00: Small Group Discussions: What Makes a Theoretical Contribution?
   • Led by current/past AMR Associate Editors/Editors

10:00-10:30: Small Group Reports and Large Group Discussion
AMR Facts & Stats

- Established: 1976
- Published: Quarterly (January, April, July & October)
- Circulation: 16,073
- Submissions: 400-500 a year
- Acceptance Rate: 6-8%
- Double-Blind Peer Reviewed: 3 reviewers
- Goal: 60 days from submission to first decision
- Impact Factor: 9.41  5-Year Impact Factor: 13.63
- Rank: #1 in Business; # 2 in Management
  (2016 Journal Citation Reports)
AMR’s Mission

http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Information-for-Contributors.aspx

◆ To “publish new theoretical insights that advance our understanding of management and organizations.”

◆ AMR publishes “novel, insightful, and carefully crafted conceptual articles that challenge conventional wisdom concerning all aspects of organizations and their role in society.”

  • We do not publish literature reviews, case studies or empirical research.
Possible Paths
http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Information-for-Contributors.aspx

- Develop new theory
- Significantly challenge current theory
- Synthesize recent advances and ideas into fresh theory
- Initiate a search for new theory by pointing out and carefully delineating a novel type of problem
- Craft ways to improve the process of theory development

Diverse styles of theorizing: *proposition-based, process models/narratives & typologies* (Cornelissen, 2017)
What do we want?
What do we need?

◆ We want our authors to
  • craft novel, groundbreaking theoretical papers that push the boundaries of our field.

◆ We need diverse new voices that create bold, “big idea” papers that launch new streams of research and change our conversations about organizations.
Our Developmental Mission

- Develop our authors and make AMR the gold standard for developmental reviewing
Developmental Reviews

- Helps authors discover gems and take their work to the next level

- **Perspective taking**
  - What does the author need?

- **Visualizing the Author**
  - Picture the author in your office.... what would you say to them?

- Role shift: *from gate keepers to colleagues*
Why a Developmental Approach is Important (for AMR and the Academy)

- **Raises the Level of Scholarship for AMR and the field.**
  - We need to encourage rather than deflate our authors, because our authors are the future of our field.

- **Helps Authors Push the Boundaries of Their Work**
  - Punitive reviews narrow visions and rewards authors for taking small, safe steps.

- **Levels the Playing Field and Promotes Inclusion of Diverse Voices**
  - We need bold new ideas from fresh voices.
The Review Process at AMR

- Initial submission goes to Editor
  - Suitable for AMR?

- Editor assigns Associate Editor (AE) (please suggest!)
  - Suitable for review?

- AE selects three reviewers (double blind)

- AE renders final decision
  - Goal: 60 days from submission to decision
  - Options: Reject, R&R, conditional accept, accept
    - Approximately: 15-20% offered R & R
    - Approximately: 50% of R1s invited to do R2
    - Approximately: 90% of R2s accepted
  - Goal: Make decision in 2 rounds
Academy of Management Review

- Why do papers get rejected?
- How do I get mine accepted?
## Feedback Form for Reviewers

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Completely Inadequate</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Modest</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Very Strong</th>
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<td>Clarity of Exposition</td>
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<td>Incorporation of related theory from other areas of management/</td>
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<td>Level of interestingness, novelty or creativity?</td>
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<td>Level of Importance?</td>
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<td>Potential significance of theoretical contribution</td>
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<td>Magnitude of contribution relative to length</td>
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Reviewer Recommendation

- Accept as Is
- Minor Revision Needed
- Major Revision Needed
- Doubtful that revision would be successful
- Reject
Scope and Contribution

- Hooking readers - Why is this important?
  - Need to answer problematization question: “without this work, what can’t we understand?’ or even more seriously: ‘what do we get wrong?’”
- Focus is too broad or too narrow (e.g., grand epic theory vs. incremental steps)
- Try to do too much or too little
- “First” or “Only” not enough
- Novel? Have others addressed this using different labels?
Chutes and Ladders

◆ Structuring the Paper
  • Teeing up, wait for it, and winding roads
  • Literature review overwhelms paper
  • Promises made but not delivered

◆ Clear Writing (and rewriting!)
  • Clear thinking/clear writing synergy
  • Friendly reviews
  • It’s all about the rewrite – nothing is wasted.
  • Never lose sight of your reader
What readers want

- **Clear** (nearly effortless reading)
- **Compelling** (why is this important?)
- **Coherent and focused** (1-2 strong messages)
- **Papers that offer a clear, direct, and compelling story that hooks the reader, then carries them on a straightforward journey from the beginning to the very end of the manuscript.**
- **Novel and exciting new ideas they can use**
  - They can’t use your ideas if they don’t understand them or if your gems are buried in your paper.
Summary: Core Questions

- Is the topic important and interesting? Does it pass the “so what” test?
- Does the paper create, extend or advance management theory in a significant way?
- Are there clear implications for future research/practice?
- Does it contain a well-developed and articulated theoretical framework or typology?
- Are underlying causal mechanisms explained clearly?
Summary: Core Questions

◆ Is relevant literature used and accurately cited?
◆ Are the constructs defined clearly? Avoid:
  • Same constructs labeled differently throughout manuscript
  • Different constructs used synonymously - construct soup
  • Questionable selection (why these and not others?)
  • New label for same old thing/repackaging old ideas
◆ Did you demonstrate effort?
  • Don’t hand wave – know the literature, cite the literature
  • AVOID TYPOS AND GRAMMAR/LANGUAGE ERRORS
And...

- Friendly (but not overly friendly)-review, a must!!!!
- Get a non-academic friendly-review:

  *The Grandmother Test*
Small Group Discussion

◆ Sample questions
  • What does “making a theoretical contribution” mean?
  • As authors, what are some of the dilemmas we face when writing theory?
  • Handling R & R’s and the publication process
Report Back
(15 minutes to share small group ideas)

◆ Common themes, ideas and resources

- Check out our FAQ website
Remember.....

It's all about support and relationships

... no one does it on their own.
Joy and Humor

Really? I thought it was Publish or Paris.