

AMR Writing Theoretical Papers – A Workshop from the Editors

Program Session #5/Submission: 17886/ Sponsor(s) AAA

**Friday August 9, 2013
8:00 - 10:30 AM at Dolphin Resort, Asia 1**

Organizer: Roy Suddaby, University of Alberta

Session Coordinators/Presenters: Belle Rose Ragins, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Cynthia E. Devers, Michigan State University
Ingrid Fulmer, Rutgers University
Neal Ashkanasy, University of Queensland

ABSTRACT

This interactive workshop will help participants write clear theoretical articles that make a contribution to the literature. The session has three deliverables. First, we offer participants an overview of clear writing, and provide insights on how to structure a manuscript to showcase its theoretical contribution. Second, we offer tips and insights on tackling “revise and resubmits.” Third, participants will have the opportunity to engage in small group discussions with *AMR* Associate Editors that explore what makes a theoretical contribution to the literature.

AGENDA

Part 1: Writing and Revising Clear Theoretical Articles (8:00- 9:15)

8:00 – 8:15: Introduction. *Clear Writing Exercise* (5 minutes)

(5 minute exercise: write down your *pet peeves* about the writing style, organization and presentation of theoretical manuscripts and your thoughts on *why* authors engage in poor writing practices.

8:15 – 8:25: Large Group Reaction to Exercise (10 minutes)

8:25 – 9:15: Short Presentations on Clear Writing, Structuring Manuscripts, and Responding to Reviews (Belle Ragins, Ingrid Fulmer, Neal Ashkanasy) (8-10 min each)

9:15- 9:30: Break (ASSOCIATE EDITORS/GROUP FACILITATORS ARRIVE AT 9:15)

Part 2: Discussion: What Makes a Theoretical Contribution? (9:30-10:30)

9:30 – 10:10: Four Paths to Theory Building (Cindy Devers)

Small Group Discussions (40 minutes)

What does “making a theoretical contribution” mean?

What questions come to mind when viewing these paths?

Are these paths clear? Sufficient?

As authors, what are some of the dilemmas we face when writing theory?

As readers, what makes a theoretical manuscript a “keeper”?

What are some dilemmas we face when revising our manuscripts?

10:10- 10:30: Small Group Reports and Large Group Discussion (20 minutes)

Small Group Discussion Talking Points: Common Derailers in Theory Papers

Big Picture: Scope and Contribution

- Focus is too narrow or too broad (e.g., the grand epic theory that attempts to explain everything)
- Inadequate specification of contribution.
 - Framing primary contribution as “the first” or “the only”
 - “Fill the gap” contributions -- but not explaining why it is important. There could be a reason why no one has looked at the topic.
 - Inaccuracies: you aren’t the first or the only. Others have addressed this topic, perhaps using different labels for the same phenomenon.
- Lack of novel idea or insights Incremental contribution (small big deal)
- Broken promises: promises made in introduction are not delivered in manuscript.
- Well executed literature review, rather than a synthesis of advances into new theory
- Theory isn’t interesting or relevant to managers and/or organizations
- Manuscript does not allow for the development of testable knowledge-based claims

Constructs

- Questionable selection (why these and not others?)
- Underdeveloped - lack of clarity/definition and/or confusing
- New label for same old thing/repackaging old ideas with jazzy new titles
- Same constructs labeled differently throughout manuscript

Execution: Relationships and Propositions

- Relationships, processes, and linkages not clearly specified and/or conflicting
- Alternatives equally plausible
- Propositions and relationships either too obvious or an obvious stretch.
- Propositions are conflicting, overly-broad, or tautological
- Propositions are generic summaries or summaries of existing empirical relationships
- Left-field propositions that are not tied to text or other propositions

Assumptions and Boundary Conditions

- Lack of support for new lens
- Lack of justification for assumptions: assume away problems with the framework
- Too few or too many boundary conditions. Having too few boundary conditions ignores assumptions. Too many boundary conditions can limit scope of paper and/or never address assumptions.

Structure of Manuscript

- The two headed monster – first half not connected to second half
- Teeing up – meat of paper not presented until end – key ideas not developed

Lack of Effort

- Hand-waves at literatures (demonstrate that you know the literatures you draw on)
- Ignoring or misciting existing literature
- Figures do not reflect text or vice versa
- Typos and grammatical/English language errors

TABLE 1
Clear Writing Recipes: Advice From the Reviewers

The Hook: Creating a Tasty Appetizer

“Sell the unique, "value-added" contribution early, to keep the reader's attention and focus. I like the last line of the first paragraph to provide a brief preview of the intended contribution, with a more comprehensive statement of the intended contribution somewhere within the first 3 pages.”

“Once you have specified the stream of literature that you're contributing to in your first paragraph, and articulated what problem(s) you're trying to solve in that literature in your second paragraph, you should use the third paragraph to answer the question: How will you solve the problem(s) that you have identified? Give a brief overview of how your approach differs from earlier approaches, how it works, and why it is superior. Give the bare essentials of the answers to these questions, and nothing more. Then, immediately end the introduction, and move directly to your contribution.”

“If an author can write 3-7 solid paragraphs at the very beginning of the manuscript, they are giving both the reader and themselves a nice roadmap to what follows.... [T]hose paragraphs can work as a standalone... [i.e.,] a short précis that the author can share with lots of people for informal feedback (is it a compelling reason to write paper? Have I hooked your attention?) before they make a commitment to the full paper.”

“Write out the first five paragraphs (FFP) 100 times if that is what it takes to hook the reader.”

Creating Coherence and Cohesion: Knowing your Ingredients

“Read the topic sentences of each paragraph alone, and see if you are developing to a point in each section illustrative of the ideas you want to develop. Everything should be driving me to an unavoidable conclusion in concert with your model or theory. Then make sure all the sentences under each topic sentence drive to explain and expand on that topic sentence.”

“Write the entire storyline as bullets on one page, ensuring that the different key terms and relations cover the main aspects and are related in a logical, sequential way. Afterwards, refine the key terms and relations to come with a more fine-grained structure.”

Getting to the Core: Embracing the Lean Cuisine Approach

“One exercise that I do as an author (after I have written the first draft) is to go back and justify the need for each and every one of the para[graphs] that I have written. This forces me to make connections between the different ideas in the paper and develop a good map of the overall landscape – which then helps the reader and makes it easy for them to follow my (author's) thought process.”

Organizing Your Manuscript: “Plating” Your Tasty Ideas

“Explicitly structure your message (using subheadings, for example) to help the reader get the point and keep the point in mind while reading the paper. (Think about subheading structure as an outline for the intended contribution -- a good tight logical outline of the argument.)”

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WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Thanks so much for attending our AMR Writing Theoretical Papers Workshop.

We offer these types of workshops every year, and we'd love your thoughts and recommendations on what you liked (what we should keep) and what we could tweak.

Please take just a moment to jot down some of your reactions. We can't make it better without your help! Thank you!

What worked for me:

What didn't work for me:

Ideas for improvement:

After completing this form, please put it face down in the middle of your table.
Thanks again!