

EDITORS' COMMENTS: YOUR FIRST AMR REVIEW

Although some new scholars may have a lot of experience reviewing journal and conference submissions, others may have doubts about the first invitation to review at *AMR*. Reviewing a conceptual manuscript is a much different task than reviewing an empirical one. There are fewer "rules" associated with it, and a lot of new scholars may doubt the extent to which their views on a manuscript's clarity can make a useful contribution in the publication process. Many may not understand what the expectations are for doing a developmental review for *AMR*. Given that level of uncertainty, there may just be a preference to click the "decline" button and get on with the rest of life.

Yet clearly there is also a value, for young scholars, in reviewing conceptual manuscripts. Reflecting on our experiences, we found that, through reviewing, we gained an appreciation for the structure of both empirical and conceptual works, an understanding of how to better organize our thoughts and arguments in our own theory writing, and insight into novel approaches to methodological and conceptual challenges. We also found that reviewing helped open up a new universe of interesting ideas, not merely through what we read but also through our interaction with editors who served as our mentors in our early reviews. This essay is aimed at encouraging emerging scholars to participate in the review process at *AMR*, as well as helping them craft developmental conceptual reviews. We do this by answering some common questions that scholars may have about reviewing in general and reviewing at *AMR* in particular.

HOW DO I GET SELECTED AS A REVIEWER?

At *AMR* the associate editor (AE) chooses three reviewers for each manuscript. Some reviewers are appointed editorial board members, but others come from a database of ad hoc reviewers who are called on to provide reviews for the journal. It is rare that you would be chosen for your first review as a pure "cold call," by which we mean that in searching the ad hoc reviewer database, an AE rarely selects reviewers who are

not known in the field and have not reviewed for the journal.

With that said, there are a lot of ways to get picked as a first-time *AMR* reviewer. One way (obviously) is to make sure to build and grow your own publication pipeline. It is practice here at *AMR* to select scholars who have been published to serve as first-time reviewers. We select authors who have been publishing visible and high-quality work in the field closest to that of the manuscript to serve as first-time reviewers. You can increase your chances of selection by taking proactive steps. For example, you can contact the editor or an AE to directly express your desire to review for *AMR*. In this way you may also make us more aware of your record, since we may not be aware of work that is in press at other journals. This is particularly true for new scholars whose work is being accepted and put into the publication process in the first couple of years on the job. While submitting a manuscript to *AMR* also automatically puts you into our database of ad hoc reviewers, it is unlikely you would be selected from there until some of your research was published.

There are other ways to increase your visibility. You may have done a review for the editor or one of the AEs in a previous capacity, either for another journal or for a conference. You may have met one of the AEs while you were looking for a job, when he or she came to speak at your school, or at a roundtable discussion or seminar. You may be a coauthor on a paper or book chapter cited in an *AMR* submission, or an AE may have seen you present a paper at a recent conference. The *AMR* theory writing workshop at the annual Academy of Management meeting and smaller regional Academy and topic-focused conferences offer opportunities to meet editors and briefly discuss your research and willingness to help. At each point it's always a good idea to take a moment to discuss your willingness to review for the journal. We have good memories here, especially for those who want to help.

When you register in our system as an ad hoc reviewer, please take the time to carefully select your reviewer keywords. Be as specific as you can here; choosing a keyword such as "strategy,"

"human resources," or "organizational behavior" is unlikely to be as productive as choosing a more narrow part of the field where you are now a specialist. We try to match manuscripts with reviewer expertise, so the more specific you are with your keywords, the better able we are to make a good match. Should a manuscript come in that's related to your area of expertise, it's likely we'll send you an invitation to review. Once invited, naturally, it's a good idea to accept, since it's unlikely we'll keep inviting you if you develop a track record of declining review invitations.

PEOPLE IN MY DEPARTMENT SAY I SHOULDN'T REVIEW MUCH ... WHAT DO I SAY?

These colleagues are well meaning, in that they are concerned with how you use your time. And it's not selfish to consider what you get out of the time spent reading a manuscript and composing your review. Early in your career, it often helps to balance the review invitations you accept so that you are working on only one review at a time. In general, most journal editors understand when you occasionally need to say no to a review request; it's better than overcommitting by saying yes to too many and not being able to do a thorough job. As noted earlier, however, it's not a good idea to decline that first review, particularly if you reached out and asked to be considered as a reviewer. A track record of declined invitations and late and low-quality reviews makes it less likely that you'll be invited to review in the future.

With that said, time spent in reviewing in general, and reviewing for *AMR* in particular, is a wise investment for at least three reasons: (1) it gives you an idea of some of the emerging ideas and concepts in the field, (2) it gives you a sense of the connections people are making between fields within the Academy, and (3) it makes you think carefully about what makes a potentially publishable *AMR* manuscript and so improves your own writing.

First, when you are a new reviewer, you will be asked to review manuscripts that are very close to your area of expertise. We send you these manuscripts because you know the state of the art in the literature, but you can benefit by seeing where the field is going and getting a better sense, perhaps, of how other researchers may be approaching topics similar to your own research. You may be an expert in the area of these

manuscripts, but reading how others see the domain can really open your eyes to fresh new perspectives and combinations of findings that may have implications for how you frame your own thinking and future research. These new perspectives will help you diversify the base of literature and research in which you are currently grounding your research, making it more likely that you can make unique theoretical contributions in your future work. In short, it can be a great learning experience for you.

Second, reviewing widens your understanding of how your own discipline connects to other academic disciplines. For example, by reviewing manuscripts on emotions and affective experiences at work, the first author (Gary Ballinger) gained key insights about how work in related fields such as social and clinical psychology can inform work in organizational behavior. Seeing the way authors integrate multiple academic disciplines in a manuscript also helps give you a sense of how to draw on other disciplines, which ultimately increases your theoretical skills and ability to contribute to the literature.

Finally, one of the hidden benefits that we've found in reviewing manuscripts is that it has made us better writers. Not only does reviewing sharpen our theoretical skills but the process of skillfully reading a manuscript, identifying its contribution and gaps, and clearly prioritizing these in a review helps us sharpen our writing skills and better organize our own conceptual manuscripts. The manuscripts you review will provide you with ideas for how to (and how not to) write well and communicate your conceptual ideas effectively. And, as noted above, becoming a reviewer for *AMR* is also one of the best ways to get a sense of just what it takes to make a unique theoretical contribution.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT REVIEWING FOR *AMR*?

The process of reviewing theory is different from that of reviewing empirical work. In reviewing empirical work, there is a different set of checklists and templates for consideration (e.g., Campion, 1993). For example, issues of validity must be considered. There may be fatal flaws in the design and construction of a study, or in the analysis of the data, that you are obligated to look for so that the field can rely on the

study's findings if the paper is published. That is part of the obligation of reviewing empirical work.

In reviewing a conceptual manuscript, you have a similar obligation, and this has implications for how you should approach reading and reviewing the manuscript. As a reviewer, you should be looking for the extent to which the insights and theory proposed are novel and do not overlap significantly with existing work in the field. That is one part of the "contribution" question. If the authors say that a particular area has not been studied and you know of ten different studies on close variations of this particular question, you are obligated to bring that up.

Another thing to look for is clarity. If you are not sure what the authors are predicting or you think their logic is incorrect, you are obligated to bring that up. Odds are that if you can't understand what the authors are saying, a lot of other readers won't be able to either. These obligations, regarding ensuring the novelty of contribution and logical clarity and insight of papers required at *AMR*, bring up the question of how you should approach the task of reading the paper and composing the review, which we address in the next section.

Another thing to keep in mind for *AMR* is that you do have latitude to suggest that authors present their points in a different order or comprehensively rewrite particular sections of the manuscript. Reviewing theory allows you a lot more latitude in what you suggest because authors are not stuck with a methodological flaw in their data that makes the paper inherently flawed. A theory, even one with a logic flaw, is inherently fixable, in that authors can strive to create a new model that may change the ordering of elements or create more distinct constructs. This does not make reviewing for *AMR* easier or more difficult, but it does provide you with greater room to be more developmental in suggesting changes to the structure, content, and tone of a manuscript.

HOW MUCH "EXTRACURRICULAR" READING SHOULD I DO TO COMPLETE THE REVIEW? WHAT DO I DO IF MY EXPERTISE DOES NOT COVER ALL OF THE THEORIES OR CONSTRUCTS IN THE SUBMISSION?

These can be tricky questions, ones we have struggled with ourselves when serving as reviewers. On the one hand, there is a need to be at

least somewhat familiar with relevant theories and constructs covered in a submission in order to provide insightful and developmental feedback. On the other hand, there is also a need to protect your time by not becoming an expert in every theory and construct you encounter as a reviewer. This is especially true for junior scholars, who need time build their own research portfolios.

Reviewers are selected in part based on their research expertise for a given topic, but oftentimes *AMR* submissions span several topics and bodies of literature. In fact, many *AMR* papers develop new theory and constructs, so there may be no existing literature to draw from. Although the focal theory or construct may fall outside your area of expertise, chances are you were selected to review because of your familiarity with some piece of it. As an example, the second author (Russ Johnson) has reviewed *AMR* submissions spanning topics from aging in the workplace and job search to strategic human resource practices and neurological bases of leadership. Although he does not count himself an expert regarding these specific topics, all of the submissions touched on (to varying degrees) the role of self-regulation and motivated behavior (a topic he is familiar with). Thus, he was able to contribute useful feedback (hopefully!) on that aspect of the theory, albeit not necessarily on all of the other aspects.

Our advice is to focus in particular on the content that aligns with your expertise, while also ensuring that the remainder of the paper tells a coherent and convincing story (to the best of your knowledge). Bear in mind, too, that *AMR* is a flagship journal intended for broad readership in the Academy. It is therefore important that the articles and the theories described therein are sufficiently interesting and accessible to those whose primary research interests may not align with the topics covered in a specific article. In fact, it can be quite helpful to receive feedback from a reviewer who is somewhat removed from the topic in question as a check on whether the content is, for example, too esoteric or "jargony."

Having just recommended that it is okay to rely on your current expertise when reviewing, we note that there are instances when we do not abide by this rule. In cases where a scholarly work features prominently in a submission (e.g., it is cited numerous times throughout the manuscript), it is helpful to track that work down and

read it prior to writing the review. Doing so makes it easier to judge the novelty and value added of the theoretical contribution of the submission in question, which is a make-or-break benchmark at *AMR*. In fact, a quick literature search and perusal of abstracts of the articles that share similar keywords is an efficient way to quickly gain an understanding of what's been done in that theory space. Devoting ten to fifteen minutes of time for such a search each time you review a new submission is a low-cost way to single out cases where existing ideas are repackaged as new theory (the "old wine in new bottles" problem). Although editors conduct similar literature searches, parallel searches by additional sets of eyes help reduce the chances that relevant works are overlooked.

At the end of the day, do not feel you have to be an expert on every theory or construct covered in a submission. Focus on what you know, and rely on efficient literature searches to fill in the missing pieces about whether and how the focal theories and constructs have been integrated previously. Although this requires some time on your part, it can also benefit you directly by introducing you to new theories and ideas that might inform your own work. Editors also find it helpful when reviewers indicate when certain theories or constructs fall outside their comfort zone, which can be communicated in the "Confidential Comments to the Associate Editor" box when submitting the review. This will help the editors interpret your feedback and not assume that minimal feedback on portions of the paper are an endorsement of the ideas presented.

WILL ANYONE CARE WHAT I SAY?

Yes, we absolutely care. Your review is essential (otherwise we wouldn't have asked). We will give your review even more weight if you craft a developmental review that offers authors new ideas and literature that inform their work. As we note above, when an AE selects you for a review, it is usually because he or she believes you have knowledge about the contemporary state of the field in a particular discipline. Three scholars review each manuscript at *AMR*, and we select these scholars because they may have a special expertise in at least one of the research areas covered in the manuscript. As

a result, the AE carefully considers the views of all three reviewers when evaluating the manuscript. Your views are every bit as valuable as those of the other reviewers, and your views on issues related to your own core research areas will be given substantial weight. Finally, you may wonder whether it matters who gets to be "Reviewer 1," "Reviewer 2," and "Reviewer 3." The short answer is that this is arbitrary and does not reflect a hierarchy in reviewer expertise or status.

WHAT IS MEANT BY A "DEVELOPMENTAL REVIEW"?

An important aim of *AMR* is to provide developmental reviews that improve manuscripts and help our authors grow as scholars. This, of course, begs the question of what it means to write a developmental review. Fortunately, there are several sources that provide answers to this question (e.g., Carpenter, 2009; Feldman, 2004; Lepak, 2009; Ragins, 2015; Sanders, 2009). With respect to *AMR* in particular, in her Editor's Comments Ragins (2015) describes what a developmental review for *AMR* is (and is not) and discusses the benefits of such reviews for authors and our field. We encourage scholars who are interested in reviewing for *AMR* to read this helpful essay. Rather than repeat the excellent points that Ragins makes in her essay, here we briefly present our view of what developmental reviews are.

Developmental reviews can be summed up in terms of four Rs: respect, reasons, recommendations, and recognition. Although reviewing can be a confrontational process, and reading a poorly written paper with ill-conceived conceptual definitions and arguments can be especially frustrating for even the most patient reviewer, nothing is gained by adopting a patronizing or negative tone in writing a review. When authors perceive disrespectful and rude commentary in reviews, their defensive shields go up, and any potential learning that might be gleaned from substantive comments vanishes faster than Michael Jordan's baseball career. As we know from the organizational justice literature, people are more accepting of negative feedback and unfavorable outcomes—such as a rejected journal submission—when interactional fairness is high (e.g., Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). There is a reason respectful and

courteous treatment is listed first in Harrison's (2002) bill of rights for manuscript authors, and respect is the first ingredient of a developmental review.

The second ingredient is reasons, by which we mean always providing an explanation for each issue raised or problem noted. From an author's standpoint, it is particularly frustrating when reviewers make declarative statements without explaining why or providing evidence (just as it is frustrating for reviewers when authors state propositions in the absence of theoretical or empirical support). A review that states "so-and-so theory does not support the relationship you are proposing" is not very informative for authors, whereas a review that follows up with one or more explanations (e.g., "so-and-so theory does not support the relationship you are proposing because you are suggesting that Y causes X, whereas the theory positions X as the antecedent of Y") is. Like respectful treatment, providing reasonable explanations is also a tenet of interactional fairness (Bies, 2001). Doing so helps authors better understand what the problems or issues are. While authors may not necessarily agree with the assessment of their work, explanations nonetheless create a shared frame of reference and a level of transparency that opens the door to further, and more productive, dialogue between authors and reviewers.

The third ingredient is recommendations, an ingredient that builds on providing reasons. Developmental reviews not only highlight potential issues and provide reasons for why they are problematic but also provide recommendations for how authors might go about addressing them (e.g., "although so-and-so theory does not support the relationship you are proposing, alternative theories A, B, and C do"). This is perhaps the most important ingredient of a developmental review, because it helps authors envision ways to improve their work. As Ragins notes, when reviews lack recommendations for how to fix the issues reviewers raise, the authors are left in a state of despair, because "they now know everything that is wrong with the paper but haven't a clue about how to make it right" (2015: 2). A developmental review does not leave authors stranded; rather, it provides them with life lines in the form of suggestions for how they might navigate out of potential conundrums.

The final ingredient is recognition, by which we mean identifying aspects of the authors'

proposed theory that are especially insightful and interesting and thus deserving of playing a larger role. The analogy of a prospector is relevant here, in that a developmental reviewer helps authors sift through the logic and ideas contained in their paper "to unearth a nugget of potential and to suggest how to polish it to make it shine" (Lepak, 2009: 376). Although authoring and reviewing may ostensibly be viewed as opposing acts of creation and destruction, respectively, the process does not have to unfold as such (Epstein, 1995). Instead, reviewing can be more creation friendly if reviewers adopt a development mindset that asks, "How can the theory be strengthened?" rather than "How can the boxes and arrows be torn down?" This worthwhile end can be achieved by recognizing the value added in *AMR* submissions, along with being respectful, providing reasons, and offering recommendations.

WHAT IF I THINK THE PAPER IS GOOD? DO I HAVE TO RECOMMEND "REJECT" ON MY FIRST REVIEW TO BE VIEWED AS A RIGOROUS REVIEWER?

As noted above, there is no requirement that you be negative about a manuscript in order to be seen as a quality reviewer. This is a pretty big myth (indeed, the first author recalls hearing this advice early in his career). Your rigor as a reviewer is not based on your recommendation to reject a paper but, rather, the care you take in helping authors realize the potential of their paper. Generally speaking, most papers published in *AMR* need more than one revision to ensure that they make a focused and identifiable contribution to the literature. If the manuscript has potential, you will have more than one opportunity to help authors with their revisions. In terms of evaluating the quality of your review, we don't look at your conclusion (in terms of your recommendation), but, rather, we look at the extent to which you have crafted a meaningful, developmental review.

ARE MY REVIEWS EVALUATED? WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR DOING SO?

Yes, the AE evaluates and rates your reviews. Although this practice is common at many journals, reviewers are not always aware of it. Nevertheless, these evaluations are important

because they are used to select ad hoc reviewers, editorial board members, and recipients of our best reviewer awards—the Outstanding Reviewer Award and the new Developmental Reviewer of the Year award. (Past recipients of the reviewer awards are listed at <http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Outstanding-Reviewers.aspx>.)

The AE uses a four-point scale to evaluate the quality of each review (see Figure 1). Reviews that receive a score of 4 (“Excellent”) are particularly insightful and developmental. That is, they exemplify the four Rs discussed earlier: they are respectful, they provide reasons for why the highlighted issues are problematic, they offer recommendations on how those issues might be addressed, and they recognize interesting and important ideas within the paper. Reviews that are deemed “Excellent” serve as a key part in the structure and content of the decision letter because they identify key issues yet also provide authors with directions for resolving those issues and highlight relevant bodies of literature to consult.

Reviews that receive a score of 3 (“Good”) are helpful and comprehensive, but they fall short of

satisfying one of the Rs. For example, a review might be overly curt or fail to highlight the positive elements that should be retained in future iterations of the paper. In our experience the most frequent reason a review receives a 3 as opposed to a 4 is because the reviewer has provided little or no guidance on how to address the critical issues raised in the review. A score of 2 (“Fair”) is given to reviews that are minimally sufficient—that highlight one or two key issues but fall noticeably short of being comprehensive and developmental (i.e., no reasons, recommendations, or recognition)—whereas reviews that receive a 1 (“Unsatisfactory”) are bereft of any details that can inform the AE’s decision.

In addition to these evaluations, we also keep track of the timeliness of the reviews. Both quality and timeliness are used to select board members and best reviewer award recipients. For frame of reference, the average reviewer scores in the past year for *AMR* board members and Outstanding Reviewer Award winners were 3.51 and 3.63, respectively. The average turnaround times for completing reviews were 29.19 and 25.74 days for *AMR* board members

FIGURE 1
AMR Reviewer Evaluation Scorecard

| Quality assessment | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | 4.0: Excellent: Review was developmental and insightful |
| <input type="radio"/> | 3.5: |
| <input type="radio"/> | 3.0: Good: Review was helpful and comprehensive |
| <input type="radio"/> | 2.5: |
| <input type="radio"/> | 2.0: Fair: Review was adequate, minimally usable |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1.5: |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1.0: Unsatisfactory: Review was unsatisfactory |

| Would this review be worthy of the Developmental Reviewer of the Year Award? Was this review developmental? | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | YES: This review was an exemplar role model for developmental reviews; the reviewer gave the authors new directions for their work. |
| <input type="radio"/> | SOMEWHAT: This review was somewhat developmental but not an exemplar for a developmental review. |
| <input type="radio"/> | NO: This review identified shortcomings but did not give the authors constructive suggestions for improving their manuscript. |

and Outstanding Reviewer Award winners, respectively.

If interested, you can request specific feedback on your reviews from your AE at *AMR*. We are happy to share with you our thoughts about your reviews and what we found helpful (and not so helpful) concerning specific comments to the authors. We can also share with you your average reviewer score after you have completed a few reviews for the journal. Here at *AMR* we are just as interested in developing our reviewers as we are our authors, because high-quality reviews are a key ingredient contributing to the development of our authors (and they make it considerably easier for editors to craft decision letters!).

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER TIPS?

- Avoid insisting that authors cite a lot of your work, even if your work is relevant. This may signal your identity to the author and compromise the blind peer review process. If you have more than one citation you want to offer the author, you can pass this information along to the AE through the "Confidential Comments to the AE" box.
- Do not state your recommendation (accept, reject, etc.) in the comments to the authors. This information is better suited for the "Confidential Comments to the AE" box.
- Separate your points into major and minor concerns, number them, and then order them in terms of importance. Prioritizing your points helps the AE in the decision process. Prioritization also provides authors guidance when they are revising their papers, since it offers them more direction on the most critical concerns with the manuscript.
- Read the manuscript at least once before you start writing your review. As noted above, you want to organize your points around major and then minor concerns, and reading the entire paper helps you get a "big picture" view when constructing your review. Reading the entire manuscript first can also save you time, because an issue you identify in the first half of the manuscript may be addressed in the second half of the paper.
- Make use of the "Confidential Comments to the AE" box. We read these closely. Suggestions for helpful information include doubts you may have regarding the clarity of the writing, or the extent of overlap you may see between this and other work in the literature. You may also make comments here regarding your recommended decision, including the extent to which you believe a manuscript is "fixable" or whether (in the case of a revision)

you think the manuscript has gotten better or worse since the last version.

- Make points about the whole paper. Sometimes reviewers focus too much on the first half of the manuscript, but it is important to also give authors feedback on the back end of the manuscript (e.g., the "Discussion" section).
- Read, and reread, the copies of the decision letters for manuscripts you review. Take special time as well to read the other reviewers' comments. This will give you a sense of what others may have seen that you did not, and it's a very good way to get a sense of how many diverse perspectives there are on the theory or construct in question. Reading these letters will also give you a sense of how editors synthesize the points from the diverse group of reviewers, and it may give you a sense of how much weight the editor gave to particular comments. Getting a sense of editorial judgment is a major benefit that comes from reviewing these letters. It's an eye-opening experience, and it's a great learning exercise if you take the time to carefully read these materials.
- Once you've read the decision letter, it's a great idea to reach out to the AE after your first few reviews to see if that editor has any tips or comments on what you did well and areas for improvement in subsequent reviews. As editors, we believe it is essential to provide developmental feedback to reviewers as well as to authors.
- Be transparent in your evaluation (don't lather the authors with praise and then disparage the work in private remarks to the editor). This may confuse authors and lead them to believe that the editor's decision did not reflect the reviewers' evaluation of their work.

In closing, we believe that it is important that new scholars broaden their experiences by reviewing both empirical and conceptual papers. There are considerable benefits that can come from reviewing for *AMR*, and we hope this essay gives emerging scholars a better sense of the meaning and impact of their service as reviewers.

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