

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS: DEVELOPING OUR AUTHORS

As a doctoral student, I was told that I needed a thick skin to survive as an academic. This involved more than just being able to accept rejection. I had to be able to weather blistering reviews that cut to the core. I had to learn to let cringe-worthy criticisms roll off me in order to earn my academic stripes. I suppressed memories of the most painful reviews, but I do remember that they made me question whether I was cut out to be an academic. I recall losing talented peers who decided that academia was just too much of a blood sport. At that time it seemed there was an underlying belief that rigor was the ability to find flaws in others' work, and that finding these flaws somehow made your own work seem more rigorous. The idea of supporting and developing your peers was devalued as "soft" and "matronly." We had to be tough because only the tough survived. This form of academic Darwinism perpetuated an academic culture of criticism with cruel undertones.

Thankfully, the field has evolved, and we are moving from a thick-skinned warrior mentality to a more developmental approach. Discussants at our Academy of Management (AOM) meetings are less likely to be invited to publicly dissect papers but, instead, are asked to facilitate discussions in which the presenters and audience work together to create new agendas for research. Most reviewers now recognize that "reviewing is not a primal scream therapy" (Harrison, 2002: 1080) and that they should be respectful and constructive in their tone (Clair, in press). Editors now emphasize the importance of constructive and developmental reviews (Brown, 2012; Caligiuri & Thomas, 2013; Carpenter, 2009; Feldman, 2004; Hempel, 2014; Lepak, 2009; Sanders, 2009; Tsui, 1998), and I suspect that presenters at university lunch-and-learn brown-bag seminars are less likely to feel that they are the lunch.

Our norms and values continue to evolve in ways that acknowledge the importance of development in our profession. For example, AOM's stated mission is "to build a vibrant and supportive community of scholars by markedly ex-

panding opportunities to connect and explore ideas" (see <http://aom.org/About-AOM/Vision,-Mission,-Objectives---Values.aspx>). We now recognize that the future of our field depends on our ability to support and develop our scholarly community. This is a straightforward claim, but what does "development" mean for *AMR* and the review process? We talk about the importance of developmental reviews, but we use the term loosely. Our profession has not reached a state of clarity or consensus on what developmental reviews are, and this has led to some misconceptions and reservations about the practice. More important, we have not fully recognized the potential and reach of developmental reviews as a way to develop our authors and advance the frontiers of knowledge.

In these comments I would like to explore what development means for *AMR* and the peer review process. Past discussions of the role of development in the review process have focused on developing the manuscript (Feldman, 2004; Hempel, 2014; Lepak, 2009; Sanders, 2009). I'd like to broaden our definition of development to include the author. This perspective recognizes that the work does not exist without the author, and it maintains that we develop the work by developing the author. Developing our authors involves building their capacity to contribute to the field. This perspective takes a long-term view that means not only helping authors realize the contribution of a particular manuscript but also helping them in their future work. It's fair to ask how it's possible to focus on authors in a blind review system. But as we will see, it is not only possible but there are excellent reasons for doing so.

Developmental reviews can raise the level of scholarship for *AMR* and for our field. Most important, this approach encourages authors to develop their ideas and find their voice. This is critical, since we need diverse new voices to create bold, "big idea" papers that launch new streams of research and change our conversations about organizations. Developing our authors is the key to maintaining *AMR*'s competitive advantage as a premier journal in our field.

## WHAT DEVELOPMENTAL REVIEWING IS (AND ISN'T)

In the last decade there has been quite a bit of discussion about the role of reviewers and the need for developmental reviews (Carpenter, 2009; Hempel, 2014; Lepak, 2009; Sanders, 2009; Saunders, 2005b). At its best, the review process can help authors discover the gems in their work, gain new insights, and find their voice and contribution (Ambrose & Daily, 2000; Lepak, 2009; Saunders, 2005a). At its worst, the reviewer can take on an adversarial role of prosecutor (Harrison, 2002; Pandy, 1995), focusing only on the deficiencies of manuscripts without helping authors envision a way to improve their work (Bergh, 2002, 2008; Graham & Stablein, 1995; Saunders, 2005b). One path encourages authors and develops their capacity and willingness to contribute to and engage in the field. The other can humiliate them (Comer & Schwartz, 2014) and may leave them questioning their career choices and professional identity (Day, 2011).

Although current perspectives on developmental reviewing focus on the work, developmental reviews also offer learning and growth opportunities for the author, the reviewer, and our field. Given the importance of this process, let me start by dispelling some of the myths and assumptions about what development means in the review process.

### More Than a Positive Sandwich

Developmental reviews are more than a positive sandwich in which a long list of criticisms, limitations, and shortcomings is sandwiched between a few token sentences about the paper's potential or the importance of the topic. Such reviews can leave the author in a state of despair. They now know everything that is wrong with the paper but haven't a clue about how to make it right.

Developmental reviews not only identify the shortcomings and problems with a paper but also help authors envision a way to improve their work. As Ambrose and Daily explain, reviewers should "offer the authors suggestions, either about how to fix weaknesses or, if the problems can't be resolved, how to start over" (2000: 248). This may involve taking a negative aspect of the manuscript and reframing it in ways that help authors address the limitations

in their work. For example, reviewers who focus only on the negative aspects might write, "The authors failed to situate their work in the literature, the literature review pointlessly rambled, and the model was chronically underdeveloped." In contrast, a developmental approach would read, "As you move forward with this work, you might want to consider situating your theory in the XYZ literature, shortening your review of the literature so you can get to your own independent contribution earlier, and clarifying the ABC relationship in your study. One way you can do this is to. . ."

Developmental reviewing helps authors realize the potential of their ideas. As described by Lepak, "Developmental reviewing strives to unearth a nugget of potential and to suggest how to polish it to make it shine" (2009: 376). This process requires the reviewer to dig deep into the manuscript, suspend judgment, listen to the authors' voice, and try to take their perspective. What are the authors trying to say? What is keeping them from realizing the potential of their ideas? This process can help authors discover the diamonds in the rough in a particular manuscript, and it can offer insights and directions for their future work, which ultimately benefits our field.

### Not Ghostwriting

Developmental reviews do not involve ghostwriting the paper, telling the authors what to do, or taking over the authors' voice (Bedeian, 2003, 2004; Hempel, 2014; Schminke, 2002). Reviewers who become actively engaged in the process can easily end up overstepping their role. Developmental reviewing means helping authors, not becoming their coauthors. Reviewers also need to recognize that authors often feel they have to comply with reviewers' requests and suggestions irrespective of their own judgment of what is best for the paper (Bedeian, 2003, 2004; Starbuck, 2003; Tsang, 2014). Developmental reviewers need to understand these dynamics and seek to empower authors rather than write the paper for them.

### Not a Hierarchical Apprenticeship

Developmental reviewers do not treat the author as a junior apprentice. They refrain from "teaching" and "telling" (Bedeian, 2004) and, in-

stead, take the role of a peer who offers constructive feedback that helps authors crystallize, refine, and ultimately realize the potential of their ideas. The process should help authors find their voice and contribution without being paternalistic (Bedeian, 2003, 2004; Starbuck, 2003). A developmental approach recognizes that reviewers and editors are not all-knowing sources of information and knowledge but part of an academic community that works collaboratively to create knowledge (Kumashiro, 2005).

### Not Lowering Standards

Developmental reviews encourage authors, but this does not mean lowering standards or ignoring the flaws in a manuscript (Feldman, 2004; Saunders, 2005a,b). As pointed out by Kumashiro:

We can still say whether a manuscript conforms to the standards that some have defined for academic research and how we think it needs to be strengthened or improved before we can accept it for publication. But we can do so in ways that challenge us as reviewers to question our own perspectives, to learn from a manuscript and support the authors—whether or not we agree with them—in the production of new and innovative research (2005: 264–265).

Developmental reviewing does not involve focusing only on the positive aspects of a manuscript (e.g., DeNisi, 2008). As Hempel explains, being developmental

doesn't mean you should only give positive comments, but ensure your negative comments are constructive. One way of making your review constructive is to focus on actionable advice, such as suggesting alternative theoretical perspectives or analytical methods rather than merely pointing out errors (2014: 177).

Developmental reviews require a balanced approach that involves identifying limitations and giving authors suggestions for how to address them.

### Not Just Helpful to Newcomers

It is easy to assume that developmental reviews are helpful only to those who are new to the field. Although newcomers certainly need encouragement and support (cf. Graham & Stablein, 1985), all authors can benefit from a process that helps them realize the potential of

their ideas by offering constructive feedback, alternative perspectives, and a sounding board for their work. Even the most senior scholars in the field can use new insights and fresh perspectives that galvanize their thinking.

### BECOMING A DEVELOPMENTAL REVIEWER

It is not easy to write developmental reviews. Pointing out all of the flaws in a manuscript is certainly easier than helping authors address the flaws and discover the gems in their work. Developmental reviewing takes time and commitment. It also asks the reviewer to acquire a new set of skills and embrace a different perspective on the review process. Below I offer three practical steps toward becoming a developmental reviewer.

#### Rethinking the Role of Reviewer

Developmental reviewing requires a conscious and deliberate shift in our expectations and understanding of the role of reviewer. Instead of being the critical gatekeeper who prosecutes the paper (and the author), developmental reviewers take a more collegial role that helps authors develop their work (Kumashiro, 2005; Lepak, 2009; Saunders, 2005b). The reviewer mindfully shifts from being an adversary to an advocate (Pondy, 1995), from being a critic to a "diamond cutter" who coaches the authors and helps them uncover the gems in their manuscript (Cummings, Frost, & Vakil, 1985; Saunders, 2005a).

This shift in roles changes our approach to the review process. As Saunders explains, "Instead of asking 'What is wrong with this paper?' the diamond cutter approaches reviewing by focusing on what can be done to make the paper publishable in the appropriate forum" (2005a: vi). This contrasts strongly with the adversarial role graphically described by Harrison: "When we slip into a reviewer's identity, we buckle on our double-blind armor and assemble our verbal weaponry. We are defending the realm of the *Journal's* reputation; there may be barbarians at the gate" (2002: 1079). This approach can not only harm the author but can also be a depleting experience for the reviewer. As Harrison observes, adversarial reviewers often find that "reviewing seems more like destroying than creating" (2002: 1079).

In contrast, a developmental approach engages the reviewer in an intellectual partnership that humanizes the author-reviewer relationship and, one hopes, is energizing for both. As described by Kumashiro, we can fundamentally change our view of the peer review process so that "giving suggestions for revisions can become part of a collaborative way to think about publishing—not as a process where we weed out the bad stuff, but one in which we support one another to produce the most useful research possible" (2005: 260). Kumashiro goes on to observe that this shift changes the tone of the reviews, in that "the conversation can be collegial, even lighthearted, and not so depersonalized and inhumane" (2005: 260).

A developmental focus therefore involves more than just helping "papers with potential realize their contribution" (Lepak, 2009: 376). A developmental approach shifts the focus from the paper to the author. By shifting from an evaluator to a developer, the reviewer can help authors engage in conversations that enhance their capacity to contribute to the field.

### Imagining Face-To Face-Conversations

One way to counter the depersonalization inherent in the blind review process is to visualize authors as colleagues and reviews as collegial conversations. Visualizing authors as colleagues helps us move from an evaluative to a developmental role (Saunders, 2005b). The simple mental exercise of picturing ourselves in face-to-face conversations with authors helps us move beyond the impersonality elicited by double-blind reviews to a more collaborative and developmental state. Instead of focusing only on the shortcomings of a paper, we take the role of an informed reader who encourages authors and helps them take their work to the next level. As described by Caligiuri and Thomas, such reviews "read like a discussion between colleagues who respect each other as opposed to a restaurant review where the critic did not like the meal" (2013: 550).

This shift in our mental frame changes our approach to the review process. For example, if a colleague asked you to review her paper, you most likely would identify the shortcomings of the paper but also offer ideas for how she could address them. You would try to understand your colleague's perspective, realizing that her views

may be quite different from your own. You would offer suggestions but also try to listen and suspend judgment. You would take into account your colleague's career stage and might also consider her long-term career needs and development as a scholar.

This shift in our approach puts us in the role of an informed reader. For example, instead of just giving advice, we may pose questions that help authors flesh out their ideas or identify the boundary conditions or assumptions in their work. When we take the role of informed reader, we can give authors our reactions to the paper, what we loved, what we struggled with, what confused us, places where we were lost, places that frustrated us, and places that hit the jackpot.

### Focusing on the Author

By focusing on the author, developmental reviewers can more readily recognize the short- and long-term outcomes of the review process and that developmental reviews can help authors in their future work. As Graham and Stabilein point out:

The review process has both short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, it serves as a screening mechanism for publication in journals of certain types and reputations. In the longer term, it has a lasting effect on authors and their research and on the progress of the field. The reviewing process can inflict pain, toughen the skin, and instill a yearning for vengeance. It also has the potential to stimulate greater sensitivity to human subjects and scholarly colleagues, develop scholarly research skills, and encourage the practice of critical self-reflection (1995: 126).

At its best, the review process facilitates learning and development. This involves taking the perspective of the authors. What do they need? What are they missing? For example, sometimes authors may not be clear on their contributions, or the contributions may be clear in their own minds but are not coming across to the reader. Other times the reviewer may offer insights or fresh perspectives that inform the authors' work or ask key questions that illuminate assumptions or prompt the authors to make new connections in their work. When reading a theoretical manuscript, it may become clear that the authors are missing a "big picture" piece about writing theory or structuring a theoretical manuscript. The reviewer can offer insights and

suggestions that may help the authors understand some of the requirements of making a theoretical contribution. This is a delicate balance, since this shouldn't come from a place of perceived superiority but, rather, from the place of the reviewer being an informed colleague who recognizes the long-term implications of the review process.

## WHY DEVELOPMENTAL REVIEWS MATTER

### A Developmental Approach Creates Knowledge

A developmental approach recognizes the full potential of the peer review process and sets aside the assumption that the benefits accrue only to the author. As Kumashiro asks, "What might it mean for a peer reviewer to work conscientiously to help develop and create the field rather than merely reproduce the standards that others in the field have already defined for evaluating research?" (2005: 263). Indeed, a developmental approach embraces a process of mutual learning and acknowledges that this process can create dialogues of discovery that have ripple effects for our field. Knowledge is cocreated (Kumashiro, 2005), and the process of helping peers refine and develop their ideas has direct implications for our collective ability to discover new knowledge. This benefits not only the reviewer but also our field by opening new doors of inquiry, introducing fresh perspectives, and discovering new directions for future research.

Authors and reviewers need each other to create knowledge. Like ballroom dancers in frame, a developmental approach engages authors and reviewers in an intellectual partnership that helps both refine their work. As Kumashiro points out, the process offers the opportunity for the reviewer to ask questions of the author "that neither of us had yet answered" (2005: 264).

A developmental approach creates a mindset that is open to possibilities. Instead of focusing only on what is wrong with a manuscript, the reviewer focuses on the possibilities and what can be right. By moving from critic to developer, the reviewer puts aside his or her assumptions and listens to the author's voice. This can create a collaborative process of mutual learning, engagement, and discovery.

The developmental approach helps transform rejections into possibilities for future research.

Given the low acceptance rates among top journals, rejections are a part of academic life. The review process yields small streams of acceptances, but it yields rivers of rejection. This raises some key questions: If the most common experience people will have of *AMR* and other top-tier journals is manuscript rejection, what is the value of this experience? Is it a slap down or a leg up? How do we ensure that this experience contributes to the development of our field? A developmental approach gives authors substantive footholds for moving their work and our field forward.

### A Developmental Approach Supports Inclusion and Diverse Voices

An important aspect of developmental reviewing is the practice of mindful listening. We need diverse voices that push forward the frontiers of our knowledge. We need to be inclusive and open to a wide variety of voices. A developmental perspective focuses on developing authors irrespective of their school, background, or geographic region. This perspective also recognizes that some authors lack the institutional resources needed to make the leap from great idea to publishable paper (e.g., Beyer, Chanove, & Fox, 1995; Long, Bowers, Barnett, & White, 1998).

Reviewers are sometimes advised that the review process should not take the place of doctoral training and that it is not their responsibility to provide research training for authors (Bedeian, 2004; Hempel, 2014). However, it's important to recognize the special challenges involved with making a theoretical contribution (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Sutton & Staw, 1995). Theory is usually self-taught, and not all authors have access to the training and resources that can help them develop their skills as theoreticians. Many doctoral programs lack the resources needed to offer seminars on writing theory. Some doctoral students have access to faculty who can give them needed insights about what constitutes a theoretical contribution, how to frame a theoretical manuscript, and what common pitfalls are in writing theory, but other students lack these resources. Moving beyond doctoral training, some faculty work at schools that offer brown-bag research sessions and invited conferences where they can present their work to the leading scholars in the field, whereas others are at schools that lack these

resources and have teaching and service commitments that limit the time they can devote to their writing. As a consequence, we may end up hearing only a narrow band of voices—and some great ideas may never be heard. We cannot afford to lose this diversity of perspectives.

The review process cannot and should not take the place of doctoral training or informal reviews. It is essential that authors have their work reviewed by their peers and at national conferences before submitting it to *AMR* (cf. Fulmer, 2012; Kilduff, 2006). However, we cannot be blind to academic privilege. Although we would like to believe that the peer review process creates a meritocracy in which work is judged on the basis of its own merit, we cannot ignore the fact that authors do not have equal access to resources that help them develop their work before submitting it to our journal. Developmental reviews help level the playing field by giving authors collegial insights on how to craft a theoretical manuscript and how to present their ideas in ways that illustrate the importance of their work. The work of developmental reviewing requires listening to the authors, hearing their voices, and suspending judgment—all factors that help create inclusion.

### **A Developmental Approach Moves the Field Forward**

Developmental reviews are important for all journals, but they are particularly critical for authors seeking to create novel, groundbreaking theoretical papers. At *AMR* we are asking authors to push the boundaries of their work and the field. Our stated mission is to publish “novel, insightful, and carefully crafted conceptual articles that challenge conventional wisdom concerning all aspects of organizations and their role in society” (see <http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Information-for-Contributors.aspx>). We are asking authors to take risks in developing bold new ideas that transform our thinking about management and organizations. The review process can either help or hinder the ability of authors to meet this challenge.

At its best, the review process can be an uplifting and empowering process that encourages authors to push the boundaries of their work. It can offer a collegial dialogue that helps authors create bold, breakthrough ideas. Alternately, the process can focus on finding the chinks in the

armor, without engaging the authors in a dialogue that can ultimately help them move their work and the field forward. At its very worst, the process can become adversarial and destructive, where reviewers exhibit an “I gotcha” mentality (Epstein, 1995) or channel their frustrations with the manuscript into hostile and humiliating reviews that criticize not only the paper but also the author’s scholarly abilities (Comer & Schwartz, 2014; Harrison, 2002). These punitive reviews can lead to lost voices; they can drive authors away from a journal, or even the field (Day, 2011). *AMR* needs to be the first-choice outlet that authors go to with their groundbreaking work. Their choice will be driven not only by the citation count and reputation of *AMR* but also by their perceptions of how they will be treated in the review process and how receptive the journal is to their work and their voice.

The review process can shape the evolution of authors and our field. It can help authors create “big idea,” galvanizing work, or it can drive them to write “safe theory” that narrowly situates their work in accepted ways. A punitive process not only thickens the skins of authors but can also narrow their vision and reward them for taking small, safe steps. They become academic aardvarks, their long noses snuffling into smaller and smaller niches of safe research. They stop asking the big, risky questions that move our field forward.

We need bold new ideas from fresh voices. We need to engage in conversations that foster the full exposition of ideas, rather than to focus only on the flaws and limitations of the work. We need to encourage rather than deflate our authors, because our authors are the future of our field. We need to support a review process that can create collegial conversations that help authors take risks and push the boundaries of our field forward.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND OUR NEW TEAM**

As a leading journal in our field, *AMR* can set the standard for developmental reviews. We can support and promote a culture of development and inclusion in which developmental reviews are the norm rather than the exception. In line with these goals, let me introduce my extraordinary team of developmental editors, who are

exceptional for the quality and breadth of their scholarship and for their commitment to developing our authors and giving them the very best of the review process. My incoming team of associate editors are Gary Ballinger (University of Virginia), Jean Bartunek (Boston College), Kris Byron (Syracuse University), Joep Cornelissen, (VU University Amsterdam), Russell Johnson (Michigan State University), Donald Lange (Arizona State University), Mike Pfarrer (University of Georgia), Sherry Thatcher (University of South Carolina), and Hugh Willmott (City University London and Cardiff University). As illustrated in their biographical backgrounds, which are described in detail on our *AMR* website (see <http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Editorial-Team.aspx>), this editorial team has a broad range of expertise that reflects the Academy's diverse interests. They represent macro, micro, and meso perspectives, as well as fourteen different divisions in the Academy of Management.

The future of *AMR*, and our field, rests with our authors. Developmental reviews are an investment in our future; they support our community and shape our collective knowledge. They raise the level of scholarship not only for our journal but also for our field. At *AMR* we will continue to distinguish ourselves not only by the quality of the work published in our journal but by the excellence of our review process and our commitment to developing future generations of scholars.

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