Developing Insights through Reviews: Reflecting on the 20th Anniversary of IJMR

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This year marks a change in the editorial team at the International Journal of Management Reviews (IJMR). We bid farewell to Caroline Gatrell, who steps down as Co Editor-in-Chief, having been in post since January 2014. In turn, we welcome Katie Bailey who joins Dermot Breslin as Co Editor-in-Chief of the journal. Since becoming Editor-in-Chief, Caroline has overseen a dramatic increase in the journal's reach and impact. Downloads of IJMR papers have increased from 204,403 in 2014, to 428,600 in 2018. At the same the journal's 2-year impact factor (IF) has almost doubled from 3.857 in 2014 to 7.6 in 2018. As IJMR reaches its 20th anniversary, it is good time to reflect on the evolution of the journal, and examine key turning points with regards its positioning, aims and scope. IJMR was founded in 1999 by Cary Cooper and Alan Pearson, as a much-needed outlet for literature reviews in the field of management and organisation studies (MOS). In the early days, authors included both early career/doctoral students publishing literature reviews from their PhD theses, and established scholars taking stock of changes in a specific domain of study. The journal's positioning has evolved over the past 20 years, and its journey has been particularly shaped by three key changes in editorial strategy.

The first of these relates to Allan McPherson and Oswald (Ossie) Jones's call for reviews to adopt more rigorous approaches (McPherson and Jones, 2010). McPherson and Jones (2010) emphasised the need for review papers to be transparent in the approach taken to review the literatures. Authors were thus encouraged to include a discussion of their 'research methods', so that readers could understand how the review was completed, including decisions around which papers to include in the review (Macpherson and Jones, 2010). Macpherson and Jones (2010) suggested authors refer to Denyer and Tranfield's (2009) principles of transparency, inclusivity, explanation and heuristic. Since then, there has been a greater proportion of papers published in the journal which are based on a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al., 2003). Despite this increase, IJMR remains pluralistic in its approach, and is indeed largely agnostic with regards to the method used to complete the review. Jones and Gatrell (2014) for instance highlight the predominance of the 'traditional narrative review', which is based on informal mechanisms for organizing and analysing the literature (Hammersley, 2001). They also identify and encourage other approaches with origins in other disciplines, such as meta-ethnography, meta-narrative, realist synthesis and meta-analysis. Authors are invited to submit whichever kind of review is most appropriate for their subject, but are expected to justify their approach, and to be transparent about their methods for selection.

The second change in the journal's positioning relates to Ossie Jones and Caroline Gatrell's later move away from descriptive reviews, i.e. reviews which largely seek to synthesise a body of work. In this regard, the increasing levels of rigour expected from IJMR reviews does not substitute for the need to make a contribution, by presenting new conceptual insights or leaps forward in knowledge. As a result, there has been a trend over the past 5 years to move away from papers which seek only to review and 'synthesise' an accumulated body of research (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Webster and Watson, 2002) to papers which explore and develop the 'theoretical foundations' of a domain (Jones and Gatrell, 2014; Webster and Watson 2002). This strategic shift was initiated around the time of MacPherson and Jones' (2010) editorial,

who suggested that the journal publish 'papers of a more conceptual nature', provided they were 'grounded in a thorough discursive analysis and review of the literature'. The move was further developed in Jones and Gatrell's (2014) editorial, which argued that papers published should be 'analytical' rather than 'descriptive'. As Baumeister and Leary (1997, p. 316) point out, good literature reviews must be an integrative endeavour and 'a literature review which simply describes a series of studies on a given topic has not achieved enough to warrant publication'. Furthermore, Jones and Gatrell (2014) highlight the role played by reviews in providing a solid foundation for advancing knowledge, thereby facilitating theory development (Webster and Watson, 2002). They further call for reviews which are more innovative in their approach, with all papers required to be crafted with the broad reach of IJMR in mind, so that reviews might be relevant and engaging among a general readership. As such, it became a criterion that all papers should 'have something original, interesting and insightful to say about the field or topic they are reviewing' (Jones and Gatrell, 2014).

The final and related change in IJMR's aims and scope relates to Caroline Gatrell and Dermot Breslin's (2017) call for papers to make a significant and novel conceptual contribution to the literature. These editors sought to build on earlier developments by identifying three key areas of distinction for the journal. First, they changed the publication criteria to ensure that all papers published in IJMR offer significant conceptual contributions, through presenting a strategic platform for new directions in research, and making a difference to how scholars might conceptualise research in their respective fields. Second, they underlined the generalist positioning of the journal, with a focus on theoretical underpinnings and accessibility to a broad range of research traditions. Third, they promoted contributions with interdisciplinary reach, taking forward Jones and Gatrell's (2014) commitment in this area.

These three changes over the past decade have been accompanied by a steady increase in the journal's Impact Factor (see figure 1). The impact factor (IF) is an index which reflects the yearly average number of citations that articles recently published in a given journal received. IFs are calculated each year for journals listed in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR), and equates to the number of citations received by papers published in the journal during the two preceding years, divided by the total number of "citable items" published in that journal over the same period. The marked increase in IJMR's IF between 2009 and 2011 was attributed to the introduction of special issues, with the first two special issues commissioned by editors Adrian Wilkinson and Steve Armstrong, raising the journal's IF from 2.6 to 3.6 in 2011. IJMR has continued to publish on average one special issue per year. However, further analysis of IJMR citations demonstrates that the dramatic increase in the IF since 2013 can be attributed not to special issues per se, but rather to the journal's repositioning towards papers which seek to make a significant conceptual contribution, grounded in a thorough review of the literature.

Figure 1 Changing Impact Factor at IJMR

2018 Journal Impact Factor & percentile rank in category for: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT REVIEWS

7.600
2018 Journal Impact Factor

Jones & Gatrell (2014)

Macpherson & Jones (2010)

Gatrell & Breslin (2017)
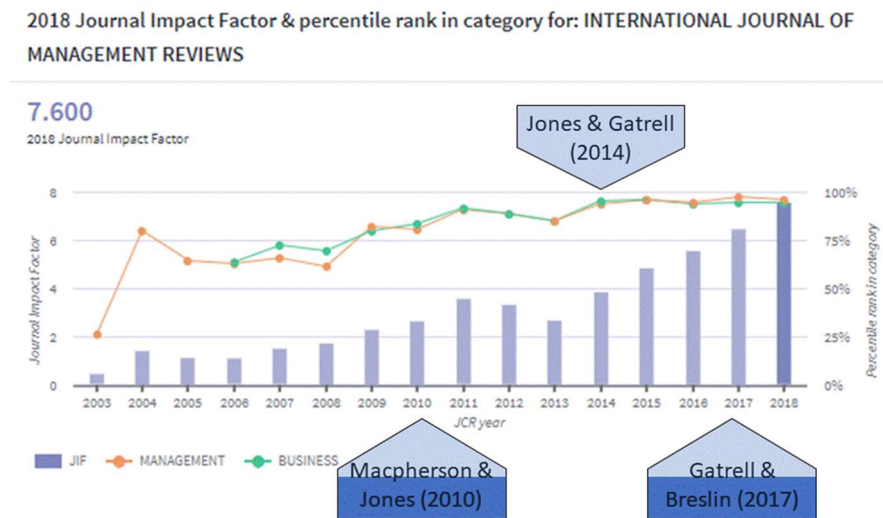
Over this period of time, the journal has also become more international in its appeal, as reflected both in its readership and submissions. With regards the former, figure 2 shows the breakdown of paper downloads for each geographic region in 2018. This shows the wide spread of readers across Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. For a journal which was originally set up for the British Academy of Management, it core audience has definitely become more international in flavour. This international focus is further reflected in the breakdown of submissions for the journal (see figure 3). Between 2016-18 submissions to IJMR are dominated by European and Asian scholars.

Figure 2 Breakdown of Paper Downloads in 2018

2018 Downloads

- United Kingdom
- United States
- Australia
- Netherlands
- Germany
- China
- Canada
- India
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Others
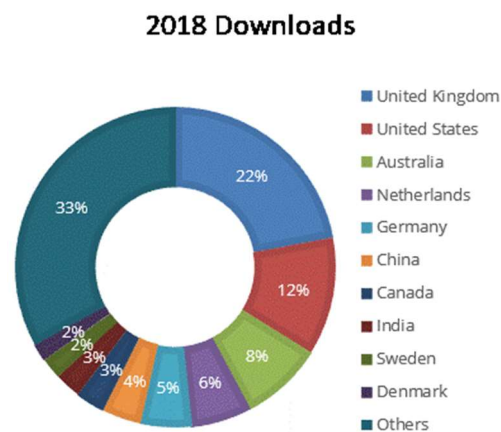
Over the past 5 years, the journal has consistently desk rejected between 70 and 80% of submissions across all regions (see Jones and Gatrell, 2014). Despite guidelines to authors on the journal's webpages, a proportion of these papers are still rejected because they contain empirical material. Papers are also rejected for various reasons including; (1) the topic may not be appropriate for a general management journal; (2) the paper may deal with a relevant topic, but coverage of the literature is limited or too dated; (3) the paper is based on an inappropriate form of analysis such as descriptive bibliometrics; (4) the paper reviews a field that is not mature; (5) the review is highly descriptive, and there is no attempt to make a conceptual

contribution to the literature (Gatrell and Breslin, 2017; Jones and Gatrell, 2014). In 2018 we received 343 submissions, 83% of which were desk rejected within, on average, 9 days of receipt. A further 8% were rejected after review, giving a total rejection rate of 91%.

Figure 3 Geographic Spread of Submissions and Desk Rejections to IJMR between 2016-2018
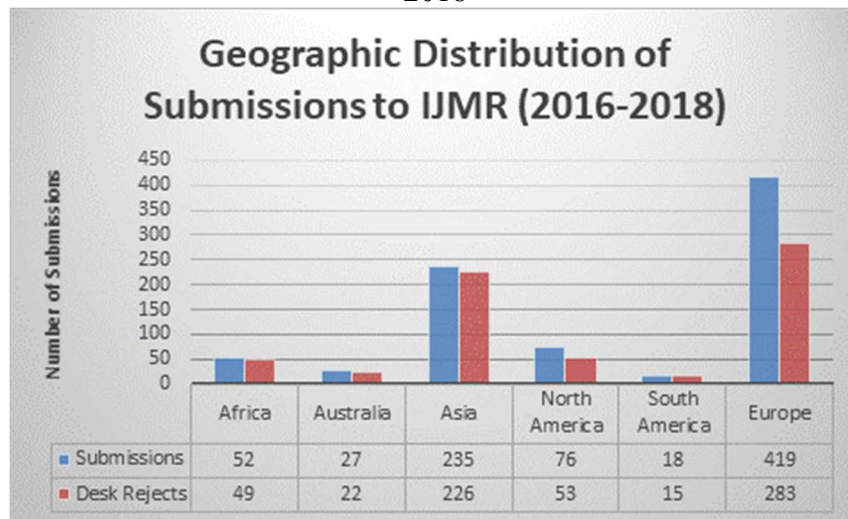
Future Directions for IJMR

Literature reviews have a key role to play in shaping the emergence and development of theory within a field of study. Reviews allow the author to take stock of what scholars have done, and then put forward new conceptualizations and directions for future research. This theory development role is increasingly important given the growing calls within management and organisation studies (MOS) for research which challenges existing paradigms and sets out new theoretical paths (Suddaby et al., 2011; Weick, 1989). Equally, writing reviews which set out new directions is not without its challenges. Some argue that the lack of variance and diversity in contributions within MOS is due to the norms associated with getting published in top-tier journals (Corbett et al., 2014). On the one hand, scholars need to abide by such norms and conventions in order to increase their chances of publication. On the other, they need to deviate from them in order to be innovative and surprising (Patriotta, 2017). Scholars can thus choose to start new conversations, but legitimizing these can be a significant endeavour (Patriotta, 2017). In other words, whilst interesting research may challenge taken-for-granted assumptions (Davis, 1971), such moves can increase the risk of rejection by sceptical reviewers (Bartunek, et al., 2006).

Writing literature reviews which make novel and significant conceptual contributions is thus a testing process. IJMR calls in its author guidelines for papers which 'challenge and shift paradigms in a manner which is both engaging and convincing' (IJMR 2019). The door is, arguably, open to reviews which go well beyond the listing or describing of a given field, and which set out new directions and paths for scholars, as reflected in the high citation rates seen for literature reviews. At IJMR we see authors taking a variety of approaches in their attempt to make a conceptual contribution through reviews. We believe that one opportunity for us is to encourage reviews which are interdisciplinary in their focus. Many journals within MOS have a disciplinary focus, and IJMR's unique generalist positioning allows it to attract papers

which move beyond the borders of a given domain. Since the journal's inception, it has enabled scholars to introduce insights deriving from other disciplines into MOS (Bell and Davidson, 2013). Such papers break down disciplinary silos, and open up 'new possibilities for creative and imaginative research trajectories within relevant fields' (Jones and Gatrell, 2014). Moreover, interdisciplinary research is increasingly seen to as key to addressing the complex problems and research questions posed by current global social, economic, ecological and political challenges. We therefore welcome papers that explore 'big or fundamental problems', through interdisciplinary approaches (Stern, 2016). As researchers 'increasingly commit to addressing complex, intrinsically difficult "Grand Challenges" of global importance there is a clear recognition that such issues and problems require a range of different perspectives that interdisciplinarity and collaboration can foster' (Stern, 2016).

Given the goals that we have set for the journal, our greatest challenge is to both attract high-quality submissions which seek to push the boundaries of knowledge, and then nurture these contributions through the rigours of the peer review process. First, there is a limited number of journals in MOS that publish literature reviews, and this restricts the number of outlets open to authors. Therefore, a key challenge is to continue to attract high quality papers from scholars who may choose to target their limited time and resources into other research and paper formats.

Maintaining Quality through the Peer Review Process

At IJMR we see ourselves as a home not only for those scholars who adopt more mainstream approaches to reviewing, such as organizing literatures, but those who follow newer, (and therefore sometimes more challenging) paths in undertaking reviews. After all, journals have a key role to play in incubating saplings of new knowledge (Renwick et al., 2019; Toulmin, 1972). As journal editors, we thus seek to encourage imaginative and innovative papers, in addition to more incremental-based research. To this end, we have repositioned IJMR (Gatrell and Breslin, 2017) and altered its aims, scope and publication criteria.

We acknowledge however, that papers which are increasingly bold in their approach (and perhaps especially those which seek to bridge disciplinary domains), may be especially vulnerable to rejection in peer review. This can be problematic for our Associate Editors, who have to reconcile sometimes conflicting comments from reviewers.

The quality that we seek as editors at IJMR is dependent on the quality of the peer review process. Reviewers play a critical role in shaping and developing the contribution of papers. These unsung heroes spend so much time and effort on the peer review process for little obvious reward or recognition. Yet, despite this work, reviewers get a tough time in academic circles, with many scholars lamenting the unreasonable demands of the dreaded 'reviewer 3'. It's little wonder that many academics refuse to review, with typically only one third of reviewers at IJMR accepting invitations to review for the journal. It is perhaps important to remember that, as authors submitting papers to IJMR, scholars will hope for colleagues to review their paper who are knowledgeable within the relevant field. Yet more generally, we are all part of a community which seeks to advance knowledge. We are all faced with the same institutional pressures to publish, which can limit our time for such wider community activities. However, by limiting the pool of academics who review, we limit the voices needed to shape new ideas and developments in our field. We therefore welcome attempts to recognise the hard work of

our reviewers at IJMR, and continue to award a reviewer of the year, as well as acknowledging work completed through platforms such as Publons.

Peer review as a socio-political process

Peer review can be viewed as a socio-political process which vicariously selects contributions to knowledge on behalf of the wider academic community (vicarious in the sense that it seeks to represent selection by the latter) (Toulmin, 1972). In this way, peer review acts as a gatekeeper in the wider dissemination of knowledge. It is worth reflecting on the different perspectives taken by different actors in peer review, including authors, editors and reviewers. On one side, authors propose new conceptual ideas and contributions to knowledge, which are received and interpreted by reviewers and editors. The process proceeds towards a consensus view with regards the ultimate decision to publish the paper. When it works, the peer review process can develop and enrich the contributions put forward by authors. In this sense, it becomes a process in which reviewers and editors work with authors, so that each paper and the ideas within this, can reach its full potential. From the authors' perspective, insightful reviews can motivate a complete rethink in the contribution being made, and in the approach taken to present this. Alternatively, it may be that with the help of insightful reviews, authors can work to frame interesting ideas in such a way that their arguments are strengthened as a result of which the significance, and even novelty of the contribution can be enhanced. Whilst the process is an imperfect form of communication between reviewers and authors, it can nonetheless result in a meaningful conversation for both. From the reviewers' perspective, reviewing requires one to engage with the topic, step outside one's own research and step inside the mind of the authors. At a minimum, this ensures that academics are aware of current ideas in their own fields of study (Jones and Gatrell, 2014). By critically reflecting on the journey taken by the authors, the reviewer then sees the world from a slightly different perspective. Reviewing thus allows scholars to put on a different hat so to speak, see the world from a different viewpoint, and potentially improve their own writing. In this sense, reviewing a paper is very different from reading a paper. As a result, reviewing becomes an essential developmental process for early career academics.

From the editor's perspective, a range of reviews is needed to a) reflect the topic of the paper, and b) the aims and scope of the journal. For IJMR, at least one reviewer should be familiar with the aims, scope and style of the journal, such as an editorial board member, and its positioning in terms of quality and contribution. The choice of reviewers will also be influenced by the topic of the paper. If the paper presents a literature review drawing on more than one domain, then reviewers may be selected to reflect scholarship within these. Recognising the developmental dimension of reviewing, at IJMR, we also try to select reviewers with a range of experience, from leading scholars to early career researchers. We welcome wider efforts to improve the peer review process, including the training of early career scholars in how to review.

Inevitably, the peer review process does not always reflect the ideals noted above. At IJMR we have seen a range of reasons for this. First, reviewers may not fully engage with the topic, or spend enough time on the review itself. By not fully engaging with the paper, reviewers may fail to see the potential for a wider contribution, or perhaps become obsessively focused on one narrow aspect of the paper's presentation. Second, and over the course of the peer review process, reviewers may dig their heels in, and refuse to given any ground to authors on specific points of difference. Alternatively, but equally as damaging, reviewers may give up on the review process, and decline to review second or third revisions of a paper. The editor needs to

be guarded against these potential pitfalls to ensure a consistency of quality throughout the process.

Beyond the peer review process, our editors (not only the Editors-in Chief but also the Associate Editor team) have become much more active in wider community activities. In addition to contributing to Meet the Editor sessions at BAM, AOM, EGOS and EURAM, we have delivered numerous paper development workshops and faculty development events targeted both at early career and established scholars. We have also appointed an Associate Editor for communications, to maximise opportunities for dissemination of knowledge via various social media and marketing campaigns. Through these activities, we aim to both increase the profile of the journal, and encourage prospective authors to develop papers which might meet the levels of contribution we discuss above. We strongly believe that institutions and wider academic communities, such as the British Academy of Management, have a key role to play in nurturing novelty, by 'incubating' blue skies ideas for further development, and we aim to support these activities. By providing such an incubation space, new ideas have a chance to first 'demonstrate their merits before being swamped in the larger population' (Toulmin, 1972, p.294).

Conclusion

Given the long-term nature of the research process, it is perhaps even more important to choose and prioritize questions about which researchers feel a sense of commitment and authenticity. Theory development is best achieved through engagement with problems in the world (Kilduff, 2006). Once ideas are developed from this the starting point of organizational practice or philosophical thought, then scholars turn to the literature to see what has been said and done (Hambrick, 2005). By embracing conflict and disagreement within the literature, limitations and anomalies are revealed, sowing the seeds of new theory (Nadkarni et al., 2018). Academics are thus invited by IJMR to engage in wanderlust, by immersing themselves in domains not only adjacent to their own but in areas which are distal to them (Byron and Thatcher, 2016; Nadkarni et al., 2018). The passion associated with following whatever path, is what drives and ultimately fulfils the researcher's calling.

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