AMR Writing Theoretical Papers: A Workshop from the Editors

Session Coordinators/Presenters:
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Academy of Management Meeting
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Vancouver Canada
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
Agenda

◆ 8:00-8:10: Introductory Comments: AMR mission
  • Belle Rose Ragins
◆ 8:10 – 8:45: Part 1: *Publishing In AMR: Pitfalls and Solutions*
  • Cindy Devers
◆ 8:45-9:00: Break
◆ 9:00- 10:00: Part 2: *Small Group Discussions: What Makes a Theoretical Contribution?*
  • Led by current/past AMR Associate Editors/Editors
◆ 10:00-10:30: Part 3: *Small Group Reports and Large Group Discussion*
  • Workshop Evaluations
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.”
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
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 developmental reviewing the norm rather than the exception at AMR.
Developmental Perspective

- The work does not exist without the author and we develop the work by developing the author.
  - Developing our authors involves building their capacity to contribute to the field.
  - Help them discover the gems in their work and take their papers to the next level.
- Takes a long-term view – not only help authors realize contribution of particular manuscript, but helps them in their future work.
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.
Announcing our Special Topic Forums

◆ The Changing Nature of Work Relationships
  Guest Editors: Emily Heaphy, Jody Hoffer Gittell, Carrie Leana, David Sluss, and Gary Ballinger.
  Submission Date: June 15–July 15, 2016

◆ Advancing and Expanding Work-Life Theory from Multiple Perspectives
  Guest Editors: Gary N. Powell, Jeffrey H. Greenhaus, Tammy D. Allen, and Russell E. Johnson.
  Submission Date: September 1–September 30, 2016
Special Topic Forums

◆ Diversity at a Critical Juncture: New Theories for a Complex Phenomenon
Guest Editors: Stella M. Nkomo, Myrtle P. Bell, Aparna Joshi, Laura Morgan Roberts, and Sherry Thatcher.
Submission Date: February 1-28, 2017

◆ (Working Title): Sociocognitive Perspectives on Strategy and Organizations
Submission Date: TBD: 2017
Academy of Management Review

- Why do papers get rejected?
- How do I get mine accepted?
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<th>AMR Reviewer Feedback</th>
<th>Completely Inadequate</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Modest</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Very Strong</th>
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AMR Reviewer Feedback

Recommendation

- Accept as is
- Minor Revision Needed
- Major Revision Needed
- Doubtful
- Reject
Typical problems

Big Picture: Scope and Contribution

◆ Focus is too broad or too narrow (e.g., the grand epic theory that attempts to explain everything or a very incremental step)

◆ Inadequate specification of contribution
  • No clear research question, too many questions, question not addressed
  • Promises made in introduction are not delivered in manuscript
  • Framing contribution as “the first” or “the only” and it isn’t (not novel)
  • Others have addressed this topic; perhaps using different labels
  • There may be reasons why no one has looked at the topic!
Hooking Reviewers & Readers

“Many papers have horrible introductions....[A] good introduction tells the story in a nutshell, embeds the paper in its research context, explains the contribution (answer to the “so what question”) and draws the reader into the story.”

“.... it drives me crazy when the motivation for a manuscript is because ‘no one has looked at X before’. Chances are that no one has ever studied the causal link between managers’ favorite cheeses and their leadership style, but that doesn’t mean someone should.”

“If I haven't reached the author's own contribution by pages 10-12, I start getting annoyed...”
Typical problems

Big Picture: Scope and Contribution – cont.
- Nice lit review, no synthesis of recent advances into new theory
- Theory isn’t interesting or relevant to managers and/or organizations
- Does not allow for testable knowledge-based claims

Inadequate Construct Definition and/or Use
- Underdeveloped - lack of clarity/definition
- 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
Execution: Relationships and Propositions

- Relationships and linkages not clearly specified and/or conflicting
- Alternative explanations
- Propositions & relationships either too obvious or do not reflect arguments
- 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
  - Propositions should logically flow from your development
  - Do you need propositions?
From Reviewers – What we want

- Manuscripts that offer a clear, direct, and compelling story that hooks the readers, and then carries them on a straightforward journey from the beginning to end.

What we often get

- “Many of the AMR submissions I read are mystery novels, where even the author isn't sure where the paper is going to end up.”

- “Many papers are fragmented, have no thread, and tell no story... it is not my responsibility as a reviewer to search for the thread... it is the author’s responsibility to make it as easy as possible for me to follow their story.”
Typical problems

Assumptions and Boundary Conditions

- Lack of support for arguments or new lens
- Lack of justification for assumptions and arguments
- Ignoring prior research
- Cherry/picking prior research
- Too few or too many boundary conditions.
  - Too few becomes unwieldy
  - Too many boundary conditions can limit contribution
Typical problems

Structure of Manuscript

◆ Two-paper problem – first half disconnected from second
◆ Meat of paper not presented until end – key ideas not developed

Lack of Effort

◆ Hand-waves at literatures - show you *know* the literatures you draw from
◆ Ignoring or incorrectly citing existing literature
◆ Musing with no support
◆ Propositions and/or figures do not reflect text or vice versa
◆ Typos and grammatical/language errors
◆Formatting issues
Theoretical Contribution – in Summary

- Is the topic important and interesting? Pass the “so what” test?
- Does the MS create, extend or advance management theory in a significant way?
- Does the MS have clear implications for future research?
- Does the MS contain a well-developed and articulated theoretical framework, typology…?
- Are the central constructs defined clearly?
- Are the underlying causal mechanisms behind relationships explained clearly? Are alternative explanations ruled out?
- Is relevant literature cited accurately?
Peer-review, a must

Non-academic peer-review - The Grandmother Test

“Let your non-academic family members or friends read it. If they have no clue what you are talking about, it is too complex.”

“Get rid of needlessly complex language and jargon

“POS incorporates OCB and LMX within the context of JIP.”