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FROM THE EDITORS—DISCIPLINARY CODE SWITCHING AT *AMJ*: THE TALE OF GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE JOURNALS

Once upon a time, there lived an aspiring management scholar named Goldilocks. She decided her manuscript was ready for submission to a top journal. After surveying the landscape, she narrowed her focus onto three excellent journals. She decided to try a psychology-oriented journal first. The editor's rejection letter stated: "This paper is too applied, lacks causality, and only has one study!" After days of looking up authors' first names for reference reformatting, she submitted to the second, sociology-oriented journal. "This paper doesn't cite Weber!" the editor's rejection letter proclaimed. Goldilocks spent another day reformatting headers to be bolded and centered, and then pressed submit at the third journal, *Academy of Management Journal*. The editor's letter read: "I have decided to give you a chance to revise and resubmit your manuscript to *AMJ*, although I would characterize this as a high-risk revision." Goldilocks was relieved: "Ahhhh, just right!"

In the classic children's tale *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, Goldilocks happens upon the Bears' house when no one is home. She samples their possessions and finds that neither Papa Bear's ("too hot!") nor Mama Bear's ("too cold!") porridge, chair (both "too big!"), and bed ("too hard!" and "too soft!") are a good fit. Baby Bear's, though, are "*just right*." Our parody of the fable focuses on one moral of the story: preferences are idiosyncratic. What is "just right" for one journal can be seen as a poor fit for another.[1] Goldilocks's potential as a management scholar is unknown (although the revision request is a promising sign), but consideration of this tale may offer some important insights for scholars with an interest in publishing in *AMJ*.

The field of management is an exciting place in which to be a scholar. Our disciplinary roots run deep and are wonderfully diverse—economics, industrial relations, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and so on. Management scholars, as a set, have a unique breadth of preferred epistemologies and methods. At the same time, we are our own field and, within it, *AMJ* is its own journal, with a particular history, unique practices, and (frequently new) ways of seeing the world. Just as there are substance and style differences among fairytale bears, the substance and style at *AMJ* sometimes diverge from those found in base-discipline journals. As a result, it can be challenging for scholars trained in base disciplines to crack the code, as it were.

Our aim in this editorial is to make some of the differences between *AMJ* and base-discipline journals explicit, hoping to make disciplinary "code switching" simpler and more transparent. *AMJ's* mission states that the *Journal* is open to a wide variety of potential theoretical and empirical contributions. We encourage authors to strive for novelty, boldness, and interestingness in terms of both theory and empirical research designs. Given these foci, we believe that scholars trained in base disciplines have much to offer to *AMJ*. Indeed, the theme of our editorial team ("New Ways of Seeing") was designed to encourage authors to bring fresh, insightful theories and ideas from outside of management to bear on management-related topics. Many impactful contributions to management indeed come from theory integration across disciplines, or from theory originating outside of the domain of management. In offering suggestions here, we aim to encourage scholars with training in a base disciplines *as well as* a desire to publish in *AMJ* to craft papers that are more likely to be seen by *AMJ* reviewers as "just right!"

Outlining generalities about how preferences in base disciplines differ from those at *AMJ* is a risky business. We therefore begin with a few important caveats. First, the differences we observe herein and the points we make should be seen as neither exhaustive nor honed by scientific precision. We simply present a set of recommendations based on our collective observations, while also acknowledging that there is great variability both between and within disciplines regarding what is valued and defined as "good" research. Second, our points should be interpreted as suggested only if *AMJ* or a similar journal is the desired outlet. There are many different ways to craft a meaningful scientific contribution, and we personally value the variety in norms,

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[1] A second moral of the story is that breaking and entering is not "right" either. Our adoption of this tale does not mean that we condone Goldilocks's behavior.

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expectations, missions, and styles across journals and fields (and, as authors, our collective set of rejections in base-discipline journals suggest we need code switching advice as well!). Third, we do not mean to imply that there is only one formula for *AMJ*, but to point out some common practices and reactions from reviewers about papers that attempt disciplinary code switching for an *AMJ* audience, to make explicit some assumptions, and to offer some suggestions informed by our opinions and experiences. Finally, given our backgrounds, our advice is most applicable to micro-oriented quantitative scholars trained in base disciplines such as social and other areas of psychology.

With those caveats in mind, in this article, we focus our discussion on three areas in which norms at *AMJ* at times seem to diverge from practices at journals in base disciplines: the "porridge" (i.e., crafting a contribution), the "chair" (i.e., theory development), and the "bed" (i.e., method and analyses). We discuss examples of divergence relevant to each of these three areas. Other detailed treatments of framing a contribution and theory development (e.g., Grant & Pollock, 2011; Sparrowe & Mayer, 2011), as well as crafting methods and analyses (Colquitt, 2008; Zhang & Shaw, 2012), at *AMJ* and other management journals already exist. Our goal is not to reiterate this prior work, but rather to compare how practices at *AMJ* may differ from those more common in some base-discipline journals.

THE PORRIDGE: CRAFTING A CONTRIBUTION

Contribution—and particularly contribution to theory, as opposed to practical contributions, replications, and so on—is the most important consideration in determining whether an article meets *AMJ*'s criteria for publication. Just as porridge provides sustenance to fairytale bears, so too does articulating a theoretical contribution give sustenance to an *AMJ* submission.

Contribution is the *sine qua non* that determines whether a paper is accepted at any number of journals, but there are differences in how contribution is defined and articulated at *AMJ,* as compared to other journals. Stylistically, *AMJ* readers expect the contribution to theory to be articulated in the introduction of manuscripts that present quantitative research. Unlike some base-discipline journals, where the introduction may include everything up to the first study, at *AMJ*, the introduction is often a standalone section that spans the first three to four pages. This section provides an extended abstract or brief overview of the theoretical contribution of the paper. It quickly articulates what is known about a topic, what puzzles remain, how the manuscript addresses those puzzles, and how, in doing so, it offers a meaningful contribution to theory. That is, the introduction clearly highlights, concisely, how the paper changes what we know in management already. These points are then further developed and supported in more detail in subsequent sections. In particular, the introduction is often followed by a "background" or literature review section, in which authors provide a detailed description of relevant prior work, broadly defined. In this section, authors communicate the status quo of the literature on similar research questions across the management research domain. Such a section is important because it increases readers' confidence in the authors' due diligence in terms of their comprehension of relevant work, and that what the paper is attempting to accomplish is novel for the relevant area of scholarship.

More substantively, the type of contribution valued at *AMJ* typically goes beyond telling readers that a "gap" exists and that the current investigation is therefore new. There are many relationships that have not been explored and that are unexplored for good reasons, such as being obvious, unimportant, or otherwise unenlightening (see Hollenbeck, 2008, for an excellent discussion of gap framing versus other types of framing). A "gap" argument at *AMJ* should be supplemented with substantiation about why filling this gap is critical for our knowledge. This is more successful when authors argue that filling a gap tells us something new and unexpected, radically changes our assumptions about how something works, or resolves inconsistent findings, and when authors explain why we cannot simply apply what we know about similar constructs to answer the research question. Perhaps this difference also maps onto varying expectations for "novelty." For example, it could be that the filling of a gap is "new," but could have easily been hypothesized in the same way by drawing from what we already know in management about a similar phenomenon, even if it does not involve the exact same constructs. Such a contribution often feels too incremental for *AMJ*. There is indeed great value in demonstrating new relationships and constructs, and, in some journals, this is sufficient for a strong contribution. In contrast, the scholarly community at *AMJ* is primarily concerned about whether and how a manuscript substantially changes our understanding of existing theory. This is gauged in light of what we know already, or could reasonably deduce, from existing scholarship in management.

Put differently, *AMJ* expects authors to articulate what broader conversation *in management* they are entering, and which new elements they are adding to that conversation that changes it. We italicized "in management" here for a reason: the burden of establishing a theoretical contribution in *AMJ* is on the authors, who must tell readers how their theory alters what management researchers know already in the area. It is often the case that applying an established theory or finding from another discipline to the management literature does substantially change what we know or could have reasonably expected to be true based on our own literature. Yet, submissions from base-discipline-oriented scholars can sometimes neglect to tell readers how the paper changes the relevant management literature in an important and substantial way, leaving it up to readers to do the conceptual work needed to apply it to our field. Without an in-depth review of related management literature in the front end of the paper that tells readers how our knowledge changes as a result of their paper, the manuscript can mistakenly give the impression that the authors do not know or care to know the state of the management literature on the topics invoked in the paper. This at times occurs when a manuscript contains constructs that appear to be quite similar to established constructs in management, but fails to root the contribution, literature review, hypotheses, and methods in management. For example, if a paper is about prosocial behavior in the workplace, but it does not review the literature on organizational citizenship behavior (or use an established measure of this well-researched management construct), it can appear as though authors have not suitably done their homework.

Another point of differentiation is that, at *AMJ*, a manuscript's theoretical contribution often needs to be framed more broadly, as compared to what is typical in some base-discipline journals. Like other journals, submissions to *AMJ* are normally reviewed by three reviewers (most often, two editorial board members and one occasional reviewer). The pool of reviewers at *AMJ* reflects the diversity and breadth of backgrounds in management. As a result, although one or two reviewers may be specialists and highly familiar with the exact literature engaged in a submission (e.g., pertaining to hierarchy and power), another reviewer may have expertise from a distinct but related domain (e.g., leadership), or may even be a general reader who has expertise in the method rather than the theory or phenomenon. Authors should assume this, and make their contribution relative to existing management research clear to a diverse set of scholars. This is not to say that as many tangentially related topics as possible need to be evoked in the paper. Rather, authors should assume that general readers, as compared to uniformly expert ones, require more description of the status quo in the focal literature and clarity regarding precisely how the paper in hand changes it. Authors therefore may benefit from friendly feedback from a broader set of scholars before submitting to *AMJ*, rather than from experts in the specific topics studied. This type of feedback can help authors to better see where general reviewers may need additional explanation and justification.

It is tempting to consider the above differences in framing a theoretical contribution as a frustrating hand-waving exercise. And, while such writing does indeed require effort, this writing is part of the contribution itself. We also believe that this type of framing can make a paper more impactful. When done well, both "expert" readers in the focal topic as well as other general readers who study different topics can more easily see why the paper matters. Broader groups of scholars beyond those interested in the particular set of variables investigated may then engage with the study and its findings in future work. The preference for crafting a broad contribution at *AMJ* also likely stems, at least in part, from *AMJ*'s comparatively diverse audience. This way of framing a contribution can better foster cross-fertilization between macro (i.e., strategy, organizational theory) and micro (i.e., organizational behavior, human resources) areas of the field of management, as well as between management and other disciplines.

THE CHAIR: THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

At *AMJ*, reviewers expect a well-articulated theoretical contribution to be supported by rich and sound theory development. By "theoretical development," we mean the theories, logic, and literature used to explain and justify the hypotheses. Just as a chair provides a foundation for a bear's derriere, so too does theoretical development provide the underpinning for an article.

One noticeable distinction regarding deductive theory development at *AMJ*, relative to what we sometimes see in submissions from authors trained in base disciplines, is that *AMJ* papers tend to have specific hypotheses that are both clearly described and justified as well as formally stated in the text of the theory development section. Clear and explicit statements of hypotheses help our broad readership understand exactly what will be measured and tested in the empirical sections to come, and ties back to the framing and stated contributions of the study. The hypotheses of interest in a manuscript are also often made even more explicit by including a conceptual figure, which includes boxes and arrows, and details all constructs and relationships to be tested as well as visually summarizing all hypotheses in the paper.

Another point that may differentiate *AMJ* articles is that the theory development is often situated within a broader theoretical framework or body of work that links most (if not all) of the constructs of interest together. Although relying on a theoretical framework is not always necessary (e.g., the authors may advance an original theory) and has some potential drawbacks (e.g., Schaubroeck, 2013), it is often beneficial (Shaw, 2017). For example, situating theory development within broader frameworks provides justification for why certain constructs are included versus excluded in a manuscript. Without such justification, the theoretical model tested in a manuscript can come across as resulting from cobbling together whatever variables happened to be available in a data set, rather than from strong a priori theory. It also allows authors a straightforward way of elaborating on the theoretical advances in the discussion section; the theory and findings can be interpreted and discussed in light of the overarching theoretical framework used in the front end of the paper.

The focus on situating arguments within an overarching theoretical framework at *AMJ* differs from the type of theory development that is more common in some base disciplines, where strong logical arguments that link constructs together and explain the mechanism driving their association may be the hallmark of strong theory. Certainly, sound logic is critically important at *AMJ*, but readers and reviewers often expect this logic to flow from an overarching theoretical framework. The greater relative importance of an overarching theoretical framework at *AMJ* is likely linked to our above discussion regarding the importance of joining a broader conversation. An overarching framework helps orient readers to understand why the specific relationships of interest are being introduced, and therefore how they inform and advance a broader conversation. Importantly, authors trained in base disciplines are often familiar with different theories and bodies of work than are more management-leaning authors. Use of theoretical frameworks from outside the field of management can add great value to current understanding in management, and thus a potential source of advantage for disciplinary scholars who wish to publish in *AMJ*. Yet, it must be clearly explained to readers how theoretical frameworks from other disciplines substantially alter what we know about a body of work in management, as articulated above.

THE BED: METHOD

Because *AMJ* is an empirical journal, a well-articulated theoretical contribution and sound theory development alone are insufficient and must be accompanied by rigorous empirical designs. Just as beds support bears' heads in fairytales, methodology provides the support that is needed to deliver on a contribution at *AMJ*. Due to the methodological and epistemological diversity at *AMJ*, it is difficult to speak comprehensively about how common methods in discipline-oriented journals differ from what is typical at *AMJ*. We nevertheless offer some observations below.

One reasonably common point of differentiation is that *AMJ* readers and reviewers expect all variables and relationships tested in a paper to precisely mirror what is formally hypothesized. The assumption is that, if a variable is important enough to be a focal point in the analyses, it should also be a focal point in the theory development and literature review. For example, an author trained in a base discipline might present theory regarding the construct of fairness, and then operationalize this construct using a variety of different measures of related constructs, such as equity, justice, and morality. At *AMJ,* reviewers and readers would expect each of these measures—and their *differences*—to be formally addressed in the theory development section. In other words, in *AMJ* papers, the main independent, outcome, and mechanism measures map *exactly* onto the formally proposed hypotheses and do not include additional variables that are instead logically similar or relevant.

The reason why an exact mapping between theory and measurement is valued at *AMJ* is likely related to our prior discussion of theoretical contribution and the importance of clarifying the broader management conversation to which an *AMJ* paper is contributing. For example, an author might introduce a number of related workplace outcomes in the method section, such as job satisfaction, perceptions of person–organization fit, and turnover intentions, as a way to demonstrate the broad relevance of the paper to management. Yet, each of these constructs has a different—and substantial—base in the management literature. The introduction of such new outcomes in the methods can give the impression that due diligence to each of these literatures has not been done and may confuse readers as to what the paper is really "about." The introduction of a workplace outcome in the methods section, rather than in the theory section, can also give the false impression that authors only included it to try to make it "feel" like a management paper on the surface, rather than truly engaging with relevant management literature.

Notably, although the main constructs of theoretical interest are discussed in the theory development section, this is not true of control variables and variables used in robustness checks or exploratory analyses that are presented after the main results, which are instead first introduced in the method section. Moreover, although typically not introduced until the method section, any covariates included are still expected to be informed by the theoretical framework and past work in the relevant area of scholarship. This practice is likely similar to practices in base-discipline journals, where covariates are expected to be justified logically, but *AMJ* readers also often expect control variables to empirically account for what we "already know." For example, when studying a new predictor of turnover, it might not be enough to account for logical controls. *AMJ* readers will likely expect the authors to demonstrate that the "new" predictor explains variance in turnover, above and beyond established predictors of turnover, which are entered as covariates.

Another point of differentiation is that *AMJ* places strong emphasis on empirical demonstrations of construct validity. Alternatively, in some base disciplines, construct validity might more typically rely on face validity or logical exposition. As a result, *AMJ* readers and reviewers, and particularly those on the micro side, expect measures to be validated, multi-item instruments. By "validated," we mean that they have been established, either in prior published investigations or in validation studies reported in the manuscript, to have sound psychometric properties. If using a new measure, it is important to provide studies that demonstrate evidence of content, discriminant, predictive, and convergent validity (see Hinkin, 1998). Such studies provide confidence that a new measure is not simply a reinvention of an established construct and that the measure indeed taps the construct of theoretical interest, not a related but distinct construct. Also, *AMJ* reviewers and readers expect to see a full bivariate correlation matrix for all variables in all studies, including both variables of theoretical interest and controls, even if the design involves an experiment. Such a matrix provides ancillary construct validity information by allowing the reader to assess if all study variables relate to one another in an expected way and to ensure that variables are not so highly correlated with one another as to bring their discriminant validity into question.

Additional points of differentiation center on the nature and number of studies included in a manuscript. As editors, we are often asked if multiple studies are required at *AMJ*, or if there is an optimal number. The answer to the first question is "no," and to the second, "it depends." Additional studies with poor empirical designs, that rely on low-quality data, or that do not directly address the core research questions at hand will not help a manuscript's odds of success. But, additional studies can be useful if they provide constructive replications of initial or exploratory findings with an improved design; if they better measure, isolate, and test the theorized mechanisms; if they establish causality; and/or if they provide additional external validity evidence (i.e., that the relationships hold in "real-world" workplaces). Relative to journals in some base disciplines, *AMJ* readers and reviewers seem to care less about replicating effects with different construct operationalizations or across similar samples, assuming that there are sufficient sample sizes and construct and external validity evidence in the set of studies provided. This point of differentiation may be due to different norms for establishing generalizability across disciplines. In management, generalizability often involves recognizing theoretical boundary conditions presented by the methodology and providing external validity to the world of work. In other disciplines, it may instead involve demonstrating effects across multiple operationalizations, studies, samples, and dependent variables.

Due to these epistemological differences, the burden is on *AMJ* authors to clearly articulate the theoretical (e.g., testing a mechanism) or empirical (e.g., establishing causality) value each study adds to a manuscript and to do so in a way that the value is clear to *AMJ*'s broad readership, including both those who are and are not well versed in evaluating multi-study manuscripts. Abundant data and numerous studies cannot substitute for a clear theoretical contribution, and, given the emphasis placed on theoretical contribution at *AMJ*, the inclusion of many studies whose purpose is not clearly articulated can risk giving the appearance that the theory is secondary to the data.

As noted above, external validity—and particularly generalizability to the world of work—is an important criteria for evaluating research methodologies at *AMJ*. This is not surprising, given that, as a management journal, *AMJ*'s mission involves publishing scholarship that contributes to management practice. Greater relative emphasis on generalizability to working adults at *AMJ*, compared to some journals in the base disciplines, also has implications for what is considered sound methodology. For example, although *AMJ* frequently publishes laboratory-based experiments, *AMJ* reviewers respond more favorably to this type of design when the manipulations have psychological realism—for example, by engaging participants in situations that closely mirror workplace experiences, instead of relying on fictitious scenarios—and when the outcomes are behaviors with important workplace implications (see Colquitt, 2008, for a full discussion). Although not always necessary, laboratory experiments also tend to be received more favorably at *AMJ* when paired with field-based approaches (e.g., field experiments, archival studies, surveys of working adults); doing so is useful for examining whether the findings hold in workplace settings beyond those simulated in the laboratory.

CONCLUSION

Whether you are Goldilocks, some other fairytale legend, or just a regular law-abiding scholar, we hope the above discussion has helped clarify that doing "good research" is not a one-size-fits-all process. When it comes to contribution (the porridge), our approach at *AMJ* may be "too hot" for some journals and "too cold" for others. Likewise, our approach to theory development (the chair) will be "too big" for some journals and "too small" for others, and our approach to methods (the bed), well, "too soft" or "too hard." We also hope our discussion has helped to elucidate that preferences across journals are more than skin deep. Journal style guides vary, yes, but the important points of divergence are deeply rooted in mission-driven differences that involve different assumptions about how one goes about crafting a contribution, developing rich theory, and testing a research question rigorously.

Finally, we want to reiterate that it was not our intent to criticize base-discipline journals. On the contrary, our goal in highlighting points of differentiation between *AMJ* and some base-discipline journals is to increase the likelihood that researchers trained in base disciplines who wish to publish to *AMJ* will be successful in doing so. Thanks for *bear*ing with us.

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