FROM THE EDITORS

OB IN AMJ: WHAT IS HOT AND WHAT IS NOT?

Over the course of my three years as associate editor at AMJ (July 2007–July 2010), I was asked many questions about my experiences in this role. Almost as frequent as questions about the workload were inquiries about the types of papers that AMJ seeks to publish. As this question typically came from my organizational behavior (OB) colleagues, it essentially meant, “Are there particular types of papers at the micro level of analysis that AMJ prefers?”

The answer to this query was a relatively easy one. As highlighted in its mission statement, AMJ seeks to publish research that (1) addresses interesting and important questions, (2) makes strong theoretical and empirical contributions, and (3) highlights the significance of those contributions to the field of management. Beyond that (and contrary to at least some popular beliefs), the editorial team has not had any particular preferences with respect to topic area or mode of inquiry. There is no agenda to publish more of one type of work than another, nor is there any intent to serve as gatekeepers blocking any particular research domain, theoretical paradigm, or methodology. In sum, I found this to be a relatively easy question to answer.

The second question, however, was more difficult to answer. It went something like this: “What types of papers are you seeing as associate editor?” In other words, I was frequently asked whether there seemed to be particular themes or “hot topics” among the microlevel submissions to the Journal. This question, as I interpreted it, stemmed from a more general curiosity about where the field of OB is right now, at least as reflected in papers that scholars are submitting to AMJ.

This struck me as an interesting and important question. It was also one that I found myself unable to answer with any certainty. I handled a large number of papers over the course of my three-year term, as did the other associate editors. In fact, the Journal received hundreds of papers a year. Each of the associate editors, of course, has some impressions about popular topics and paradigms, but it is not clear how well these match the reality. So the question got me wondering, and it raised a host of related questions: Have particular OB topics tended to be more prevalent than others in the pool of submissions? Are there topics that have not been well represented? Do certain types of OB papers make it through the review process more successfully than others? Are there certain types of OB submissions that AMJ should try to encourage more of going forward? The question also caused me to wonder about the types of microlevel papers that AMJ has published in recent years. Have certain topics been more strongly represented than others? If so, can any conclusions be drawn from publication patterns about the evolving nature of the field of OB?

The longer I pondered these issues, the more unanswered questions I had, and the more interested I became in trying to answer them. Thus, as any dedicated empiricist would do, I set off on a quest to see what, if any, patterns or trends I could find. I did this in two parts. The first part focused on articles recently published in AMJ. For this exploration, I focused on the ten-year span from February 2000 through December 2009. The second part of my investigation focused on manuscripts submitted for consideration between July 2007 and July 2009.

Published Articles, 2000–09

I began by identifying all of the microlevel articles that AMJ published from the start of 2000 through the end of 2009. The criteria for considering a study “microlevel” was that either the independent variable(s), the dependent variable(s), or both were measured at the individual or group level of analysis. This included mostly work that would be considered to be within the domain of OB, but also some microlevel human resource management (HRM) work (e.g., a 2009 study on the relationships among employee-organization exchange relationships, HRM practices, and quit rates of good versus bad performers) as well as a few articles reaching into the domain of organization and management theory (OMT) (e.g., a 2007 study on professional role identity reconstruction that includes variables at the institutional, organizational, and individual levels of analysis). I should also note that I excluded articles on the effects of CEO or top management team attributes or behaviors on...
firm-level outcomes. Even though the independent variables in these studies were at the individual or group level, the studies spoke more to firm-level performance than to issues of individual or group behavior, so I considered them to fall outside of the domain of micro OB.

This process yielded 237 articles that fit my criteria for being considered as microlevel. These represented approximately 40 percent of the 601 articles that were published in the journal over that time span, including both regular articles and those appearing as part of a special research forum. The remaining 60 percent fell within a variety of other areas (e.g., organization theory, strategy, entrepreneurship, strategic human resource management, etc.).

After identifying all of the articles that met the criteria for inclusion, I assigned each between three and five keywords, drawing from the title and abstract. I also coded each article on the following three dimensions: level of analysis (individual, group, multilevel), methodology (field survey, lab experiment, qualitative, archival, meta-analysis, multimethod, network analysis, longitudinal), and data source (North America, Europe, Asia, multiregional). In some cases, this information could be gleaned from the abstract. In others, I consulted the Methods section. I then tallied, for each year, the number of times that each keyword appeared, the number of studies that were at the individual and group levels of analysis, the number that fell into each methodology category, and the number with data from each major geographic region.

In reviewing the resulting data, what struck me first was the level of variability in keywords from year to year. Indeed, from one year to the next, there were rather sizable fluctuations in the most common topics and/or themes. These fluctuations aside, there were a few keywords that appeared with relatively high frequency. The two most common were “team processes/performance” (30%) and “job performance” (27%). The next three most common keywords were “organizational citizenship behavior” or “extra-role behavior” (14%), “leadership” (12%), and “job attitudes” (12%).

There were also keywords that seemed to be underrepresented, at least relative to my perception of the prevalence of those topics in the OB literature more generally. These included “creativity,” “diversity,” “social exchange/psychological contracts,” and “justice/fairness.” Others that appeared with relatively low frequency were “goals,” “turnover,” “stress,” and “careers/career transitions.” The number of articles on these themes varied from year to year but averaged less than two a year. Even rarer keywords (averaging less than one per year) were “conflict,” “power” or “influence,” “organizational climate,” “personality,” “cultural differences/values,” “counterproductive behavior,” “communication,” and “motivation.” My sense is that studies on these topics are well represented in the OB literature overall, but perhaps less so in AMJ.

I also detected a few patterns. One was an increasing number of articles on affect or emotions. Prior to 2007, there was an average of less than one article a year with “emotions” or “affect” as keywords. From 2007 to 2009, however, there was an average of four per year (19%). Similarly, the percentage of articles with “organizational identification” as a keyword increased toward the latter part of the decade, from less than 2 percent prior to 2006 to 24 percent from 2006 onward. The number of articles on group or team process/performance, on the other hand, seemed to taper off over time, from an average of 33 percent between 2000 and 2007, to an average of 14 percent for 2008 and 2009.

In terms of methodology, the percentage of microlevel papers employing laboratory methods has been around 15 percent, and the level did not noticeably increase or decrease over the time frame under investigation. The number of qualitative articles on micro topics also did not increase in any noticeable way over time, but rather, fluctuated year to year. The highest percentage was in 2003 (18%), yet this was followed by zero in 2004. Not surprisingly, given the time and effort involved, multimethod publications (i.e., those that combine laboratory and field methods) have been rare, with an average of just 1.3 articles per year. One seemingly positive trend is that the proportion of longitudinal studies increased over the time span, from less than 5 percent during the first three years of the decade, to an average of 13 percent during the last three years.

The field of OB includes work conducted at both the individual and the group level of analysis. Yet in AMJ, the majority of the micro studies have been individual-level (66 percent on average). This percentage has, however, varied quite a bit year to year, ranging from 83 in 2000 to 46 in 2005. The remaining micro studies have been either group-level (22 percent on average) or multilevel (10 percent on average). In terms of samples, I was disappointed, although not surprised, to discover
that the majority of papers (76%) utilized data from North America and that this did not noticeably change from 2000 to 2009.

Submitted Manuscripts, 2007–09

The second part of my investigation focused on the OB papers that were submitted to AMJ between July 2007 and June 2009 (the first two years of my term as associate editor). I started with all of the submissions that were sent out for full review during this time frame (i.e., “desk-rejected” papers were not included) and that were handled by one of the five associate editors who served as acting editors for microlevel submissions (myself, Peter Bamberger, Jason Colquitt, Micki Kacmar, and Michael Pratt). I then excluded any papers that, in view of the title and/or keywords, did not appear to fit the criteria of having either independent variable(s), dependent variable(s), or both measured at the individual or group level of analysis. This was admittedly an imperfect process. However, in the few cases in which I was unsure, I decided to err in the direction of inclusion rather than exclusion.

I identified 437 micro papers that, between July 2007 and June 2009, were sent out for full review. Each had between three and five keywords that had been selected by the submitting authors. These keywords pertained to not just topic area, but also methodology and/or analytic technique, and in a few cases, theoretical perspective (e.g., “social identity theory,” “social learning theory,” etc.). I tallied the topic area keywords. In a few cases, I added a keyword if something was indicated in the title, but not selected as a keyword by the authors (e.g., the title included “leadership” but “leadership” was not a keyword). I also did my best to determine, from the selected keywords, the number of papers that were survey-based, experimental, qualitative, multilevel, meta-analytic, longitudinal, and/or archival, although it is important to note that for several submissions the authors did not select methods-related keywords.

Table 1 shows the ten most common topic area keywords. The number of papers with “group/team characteristics” or “group/team processes” stands out. Twenty-four percent of the submissions were identified as related in some way to groups or teams. The next most common keywords were “leadership” (16%) and “diversity” (14%).

It is difficult to draw conclusions about types of papers that have been most successful in making it through the review process, given AMJ’s overall acceptance rate of below 10 percent and the fact that some of the submissions were still under revision when I conducted the analyses. Thus, the following conclusions should be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, the most common keywords for the OB papers that had been accepted by June 2009 were the following: “creativity” (22% of accepted papers), “work-related attitudes and behaviors” (19 percent of accepted papers), “leadership” (16 percent of accepted papers), “diversity” (14 percent of accepted papers), and “groups/teams” (15 percent of accepted papers). Other keywords that accompanied 10 percent or more of the accepted OB papers were “conflict management,” “organization-al citizenship behavior,” “gender and diversity,” “social cognition,” “social exchange,” and “motivation.” One thing that is encouraging about these data is that, as noted above, papers on some of these topics have appeared in AMJ relatively infrequently in recent years (e.g., careers, conflict, motivation).

Work related to creativity and careers is not only strongly represented, but had higher than average acceptance rates (around 16 percent). On the other hand, work related to leadership or teams had acceptance rates that were below average. Whereas “leadership” was a keyword for 16 percent of the microlevel papers sent out for review, it appeared as a keyword for only 7 percent of the accepted microlevel papers. Similarly, “groups/teams” was a keyword for 24 percent of submissions but only 15 percent of acceptances. One possible explanation is that these are areas with higher-than-average levels of variance in the quality of submissions. Alternatively, it may be harder to make a theoretical contribution in these areas, which sometimes happens

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Number of Manuscripts</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups/teams</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity/composition</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-related attitudes/behaviors</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Incentives/motivation</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes/beliefs</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions/mood</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational citizenship behavior</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Cognition/perception</td>
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3 Michael Pratt handled qualitative submissions, both micro and macro.

4 Note: These are not mutually exclusive, since authors list multiple keywords.
as an area becomes mature and the literature becomes saturated with studies on a given topic. The good news, though, is that leadership and teams remain highly represented in AMJ in terms of absolute numbers.

An effort to identify commonalities focuses attention on just that: commonality. Yet in looking more closely at the papers submitted to and accepted by the Journal during my first two years as associate editor, I was also struck by the diversity and range of topics. The papers that made it successfully through the review process (i.e., accepted papers) dealt with such varied issues as organizational and group climate (e.g., service climate, safety climate), emotional labor, job engagement, trust, status, employee-employer obligations, work-family conflict, competition, gender bias, negotiation, and decision making. There were cross-cultural studies of motivation and performance, career transitions, and transformational leadership. And there were group-level papers focused on social exchange, team composition, creativity, inter- and intragroup conflict, and diversity.

A look at the methodologies represented in recently submitted and accepted papers is also illustrative. Most notably, 11 percent of the reviewed micro papers appeared to utilize multilevel analysis, suggesting a promising trend toward more multilevel theorizing and modeling. Even more promising, 18 percent of the accepted papers appeared to be multilevel. Lab studies, on the other hand, have continued to be underrepresented. Only 6 percent of the reviewed microlevel papers indicated “lab experiment” as a keyword. Similarly, 6 percent of accepted microlevel papers had “lab experiment” as a keyword. The fact that these two percentages are the same suggests that there has not been a systematic bias against accepting lab studies. Yet at the same time, it indicates that the number of lab studies submitted to AMJ in the past few years has remained low, despite a recent From the Editors piece (Colquitt, 2008) emphasizing that AMJ welcomes laboratory studies and encouraging the submission of more such studies to the Journal.5

The number of qualitative micro submissions also appeared low. Of the 437 submissions, only 34 (7%) had the keyword “qualitative,” “ethnography,” or “case.” Moreover, of the 78 qualitative submissions assigned to Michael Pratt (who served as acting editor for most, although not all, qualitative submissions to AMJ), only 20 represented microlevel work as I defined it for this investigation. In other words, the majority of qualitative investigations submitted to the Journal explored more macro phenomena.

Conclusions

I began this exercise with no preconceived ideas about what might emerge. In the end, I would conclude that there are no OB topic areas that overwhelmingly predominate in AMJ or in its pool of submissions. Indeed, in looking back over all of the micro papers published during the past decade, as well as the hundreds of recent submissions, I was struck by the wide diversity of topics, theoretical paradigms, and methodologies represented. This diverse profile reinforces the notion that first-rate contributions come in many different flavors. It also suggests that prospective authors should not shy away from submitting their work to AMJ because of concerns about “fit,” a conclusion that is consistent with the input that I have received from the scores of reviewers with whom I have had the pleasure to work. Reviewers will frequently comment that a particular submission does not, in their view, meet AMJ’s high standards with respect to theoretical and/or empirical contribution. It has been very rare, however, for a reviewer to comment that a paper is on a topic or in an area of study that does not seem to fit the Journal. This, to me, is good news for a journal that strives to be a “big tent” outlet for high-quality work in the organizational sciences, and it suggests considerable room for making important theoretical contributions. At the same time, legitimate questions could be asked about what this wide diversity of topics and theoretical paradigms means for the field of OB and whether it suggests a level of fragmentation that may be hampering meaningful knowledge development. I do not have the answer to this question, but it is one that I believe should be asked.

In addition to being struck by the overall diversity of topics, I also noted with interest the large number of publications and submissions on team processes and performance, as well as a growing amount of multilevel work. This is encouraging to me, as I have heard colleagues remark that it can be difficult to do team-level research in the field (since it is challenging to find a sufficient number of comparable teams) and also difficult to get laboratory-based team research published in top management journals. Recent years also have shown an increas-

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5 It is possible that some papers were in fact based on laboratory methods yet the authors did not indicate “lab experiment” as a keyword. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that lab experiments make up a relatively small proportion of papers submitted to (and thus published in) AMJ.
ing number of published and accepted papers on affect, providing validation that the field does indeed seem to be experiencing an “affective revolution” (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003). Moreover, highly represented among submissions are papers on leadership and on diversity, two topics that are clearly central to scholars’ understanding of behavior within organizational contexts.

In terms of topics that might be underrepresented within AMJ, there were indeed some keywords that were less common than I would have expected. It is encouraging, however, to see that at least some of these (e.g., “creativity,” “conflict,” “careers”) are strongly represented among the studies that have been recently accepted and/or published, suggesting that we might see a resurgence of articles on these topics in AMJ.

Reflecting on the less commonly appearing keywords, I see many potential areas of opportunity for future contributions—opportunities for more work on counterproductive behaviors, positive organizational behavior, decision making, social capital, and personality, to name just a few topics. One gap in particular stands out to me. Specifically, there have been only a handful of OB papers in AMJ over the past decade dealing with power or status. Similarly, there have been only a handful of submissions on power or status. This gap is especially salient, given that two other leading journals have forthcoming special issues dealing specifically with these topics, and there has been a burgeoning interest in the psychology of power and status among OB scholars (e.g., Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Yet most of the empirical work on power and status, including that coming out of business schools, has appeared in psychology journals. I recognize that some of the work in this domain might not have an appropriate level of fit with AMJ’s mission, which highlights the importance of contributions to both management theory and practice. However, I do think that the domain of power and status is an area of opportunity for AMJ, and I would strongly encourage scholars working in those areas to consider submitting their work to the Journal.

In addition, I believe it is worth reiterating Colquitt’s (2008) call for more laboratory studies. Some of the most intriguing papers I handled as an associate editor were based on laboratory research. I find it disappointing, therefore, that many laboratory researchers are still choosing to submit their work to other outlets, even when that work does make the kind of contribution to management scholarship that AMJ values. Hopefully this is something that will begin to change. I would also encourage more qualitative submissions. Several highly impactful articles published in AMJ have been based on qualitative methods (e.g., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), and the field of OB could be well served by more such investigations.

Finally, I think there are potential opportunities to breathe new life into some topics that may seem worn-out or passé. A good example of such a revival is Grant’s recent research on job design, a topic that has been almost absent from the literature in the past decade (Grant, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009). I would encourage my OB colleagues, therefore, to think very broadly about places where new insight into individual and collective behavior in organizations might be gained, and to not be constrained by assumptions about what areas are and are not “hot.” Indeed, there is a danger in trying too hard to follow trends and in forgetting that the field of OB is broad and diverse, with many opportunities for meaningful theoretical and empirical contributions.

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REFERENCES