Clearing the first hurdle at the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*

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Published online: 31 March 2010
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Publishing in quality academic journals is always a challenging task. Potential authors can save themselves time and frustration by ensuring that their manuscripts fit with the academic journal that they are targeting. Here at the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, we receive numerous submissions that fall outside of our aims and scope. These manuscripts normally will not be sent out for review and are “desk rejected” by one of the Editorial Team. Some of these manuscripts simply do not fit with the mission of *APJM*. Others are deficient in one or more key areas, making further review problematic. The purpose of this article is to clarify the aims and scope of the journal and to assist authors in avoiding problems that commonly lead to a desk rejection, thereby improving the odds of clearing the first hurdle and having their manuscripts sent out for review.

APJM seeks to publish original manuscripts on management and organizational research focusing on the Asia Pacific region, which includes all of Asia as well as the Pacific Rim countries and communities (Ahlstrom, 2010: 3). *APJM* typically publishes manuscripts that address the topic of improving organizational performance. Of course, this does not mean that every manuscript must have firm performance as a dependent variable. Rather, manuscripts sent to *APJM* for review should be relevant to improving some aspect of organizational performance or facilitating further research

The *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* would like to welcome three new Senior Editors, Takehiko Isobe (Keio University), Seung-Hyun Lee (University of Texas at Dallas), and Alfred Wong (Lingnan University). We also welcome new Editorial Board Members Kwaku Atuahene-Gima (China Europe International Business School), Christine Chan (University of Hong Kong), Marleen Dieleman, (National University of Singapore), Usha Haley (Harvard University), Kiyohiko (Keith) Ito (University of Hawaii at Mānoa), Steven Lui (University of New South Wales), and editorial staff member Ms. Saraswathi Ramaswamy (Springer-Chennai, India). Special thanks also to Shyh-jer Chen (National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung) and Kuang Yeh (Deputy Minister, Ministry of Transportation and Communications of Taiwan) for editing the *APJM* Special Issue Managing in Ethnic Chinese Communities (forthcoming in 2010) and to Steven Globerman (Western Washington University), Mike Peng (University of Texas at Dallas), and Daniel Shapiro (Simon Fraser University) for editing the upcoming *APJM* Special Issue Managing Corporate Governance Globally: An Asia Pacific Perspective (forthcoming in 2011).

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with that eventual goal in mind. As such, we seek to publish empirical or conceptual research which builds the understanding of this issue. *APJM* endeavors to be a major vehicle for the exchange of ideas and research among management scholars researching the Asia Pacific region.¹

With this focus in mind, our editors screen all manuscripts before initiating the review process; manuscripts should conform to the mission of *APJM*. A manuscript that does not meet the aims of *APJM* as such will not be sent out for further review, and the author usually will receive a letter explaining why the manuscript is not appropriate for *APJM* or does not fit the journal's mission. In addition, the author may receive some recommendations on how to improve the manuscript or line of research. Our editorial team rarely conducts extended reviews of manuscripts that are conceptually weak or do not conform to our journal's mission. Most editors prefer not to undertake the long review process if a manuscript has a low probability of acceptance or would require a near complete rewrite.

So how can an author avoid desk rejection and improve the chance of getting a good review at *APJM*? Recently, I provided some initial comments on publishing successfully in *APJM* (Ahlstrom, 2010). This article continues that general theme by summarizing some of the main reasons a manuscript is likely to be rejected at the desk and *not sent* out for review.

Common reasons for desk rejection at *APJM*

Manuscript lacks a research question

Many submissions at *APJM* either have no obvious research question or multiple, barely-related questions. The lack of a clear research question makes it difficult for the editors and reviewers to determine the manuscript's objectives. Without the discipline of a clear research question, a manuscript can often wonder around a topic without really dedicating itself to addressing the question and other subsidiary points that emerge during the research. I have heard editors remark that they can read all the way to the results section in some manuscripts without knowing what the author is specifically trying to achieve. On occasion a research question may appear late in the hypothesis section and may actually differ from much of the rest of the manuscript. In any case, authors should be careful to ask a clear, concise, and interesting research question (Davis, 1971).

Instead of a research question, however, many papers we receive state that they are "examining" a topic or "investigating" an issue. These statements are fine in themselves, but they are not research questions, nor are they substitutes for research questions. For example, we may receive many a manuscript that claims to be "investigating entrepreneurship" in Southeast Asia, or is "about technological innovation" in China. These are certainly interesting topics, but they are overly broad for a focused research project to be published in an academic publication such as *APJM*. What is it specifically about innovation or entrepreneurship that is to be

¹ For more on *APJM*'s aims and scope as well as other information, see <http://www.springer.com/10490>.

studied? That historian Joseph Needham required some 27 volumes to survey science and technology in China provides an idea of the scope of such a general topical area (Needham, 1982; Winchester, 2009).

In contrast, consider several good research questions (and carefully framed papers) from the management and international business literature. Klaus Meyer, a Senior Editor of *APJM*, and former Chief Editor Mike Peng recently coauthored a paper (Meyer, Estrin, Bhaumik, & Peng, 2009) that provides an excellent research question: What determines foreign market entry strategies? Other research by Peng (e.g., Su, Tsang, & Peng, 2009) has even used the paper's title to first raise the research question: How do internal capabilities and external partnerships affect innovativeness? In both cases, there is no ambiguity about what is being asked and what will be answered.² In entrepreneurship, Davidsson and Wiklund (1997) asked: Is culture associated with differences in rates of new firm formation after controlling for economic/structural factors? That question includes important moderators that were not included in earlier studies and thus represents an important extension of previous work. Another research question by entrepreneurship scholar Scott Shane (1993) in a well-known paper asked what effect does national culture have on rates of innovation?³ Notice that these researchers do not say that their research "will investigate foreign direct investment," "examines innovativeness," or "is about culture." They ask specific questions that provide boundaries and suggest a structure to the research project. As Albert Einstein is reported to have said, good questions should be clear, uncomplicated, and have an answer. When a manuscript states that it is going to "examine innovation," there is no answer to that statement—it is certainly not a research question.

Manuscript is too general

A second major reason a manuscript may be desk rejected is for being overly general and not providing any meaningful contribution to the literature. These manuscripts may have a research question (though those that do not are very likely to be overly broad also), and a clear introduction about what is to be studied. Yet they proceed to review the existing literature, and provide very basic propositions or hypotheses while offering no clear motivation for the research (why it was needed) or any unique contribution to the research stream. Such manuscripts are often well-constructed and have extensive and well analyzed data, but they fail to offer distinctive contributions and improvements to theory. Some of these manuscripts look like the literature review chapters from dissertations. *APJM* does publish review papers, but such papers should still make some reasonable and unique contribution to the literature.

² A good place to find potential research questions and to see what the field is thinking about is at the end of good research papers in the better journals. A recent commentary on goal setting by Locke and Latham (2009: 21) provided several such important and interesting questions that could extend that important line of work.

³ Scott Shane's (2008) noteworthy book *The Illusions of Entrepreneurship: The Costly Myths That Entrepreneurs, Investors, and Policy Makers Live By* uses a question to head each chapter, such as Chapter 3: Who Becomes an Entrepreneur?

A related example is a manuscript that simply gives readers a tour of a well-understood literature, constructs hypotheses with a small variation on the well-tested variables from that literature, and (surprise!) confirms the hypotheses about something that is already very well known (Ahlstrom, 2010). Research programs develop over time, and research on a particular topic tends to become more incremental. Just testing what is already well known without providing clear contributions is likely to lead to rejection in good academic journals. This is illustrated by the oft-stated adage in research methods, “I can see significantly better with my glasses on than with my glasses off ($p < .05$ level), but that is no longer very helpful to research.”

For example, consider firm innovation, something that is well accepted as generally related to firm performance. A study that surveyed managers and customers, asked if firms are “innovative” and then correlated this result with firm performance would contribute little new or useful information to either research or practice. If the key independent variable is simply “innovation,” even a sophisticated methodology with multiple items, impeccable factor loadings, and a large sample is likely to contribute little to the literature on firm performance. “Innovative” is too general of a term and should be more clearly defined, categorized, and validated before it can be useful in a study.

Manuscript is written for a discipline other than management

At *APJM* we try to be sympathetic to a wide range of theoretical orientations, ontologies, disciplines, and research designs (e.g., Ahlstrom, Lamond, & Ding, 2009; Meyer, 2009). However, we do not publish manuscripts that focus exclusively on contributions to other disciplines, such as finance or marketing. Perhaps reflecting *APJM*’s origins nearly 30 years ago as a more general Asia business journal, we still receive manuscripts on finance topics such as dividend payout or marketing topics such as advertising and franchising. While it is possible for finance (or other business) topics to be relevant to management research—corporate governance is one such example—the manuscript should communicate evidence and improve theory in management-related areas. Moreover, manuscripts also must be primarily of interest to researchers, not practicing managers. While some managers may certainly benefit from knowing more about the use of dividends and payout ratios, management researchers would be considerably less interested, unless that topic helped to illuminate something about governance, resource allocation, decision making, or other management and international business theories.

Over the past several years as Senior Editor and now Editor-in-Chief of *APJM*, I have read numerous submissions that were about accounting, quality control measurements, environmental control methods, and other areas outside of the discipline of management. Authors are sometimes surprised that this is a main cause for rejection of their manuscript. They reply with comments such as “shouldn’t managers be concerned about quality control?” And “won’t this research help managers understand their environment better?” The answer to these questions is “yes,” but *APJM* is focused on communicating management *research*, not the how to steps of quality control, for example. That means conceptual and empirical evidence (including cases) that improves management theory as well as practice. A new

method for measuring a carbon footprint would be interesting, but as with the quality example, much more appropriate for a decision-sciences or operations management journal. It certainly could be a good contribution, but is too far from the mainstream management and international business theory and research that *APJM* publishes. *APJM*'s mission is to publish original manuscripts on management and organizational research in the Asia Pacific region. Authors who would like to publish in *APJM* need to be familiar with the management literature and point their research in that direction.

A paper strictly addressed primarily to practicing managers is not within *APJM*'s scope. As noted, a "how to" set of steps directed at managers would not speak directly enough to management theory and research to be relevant to *APJM*. On the other hand, an article that summarizes and reviews new thinking or research in quality management, finance, or economics and how it is relevant to management research, especially in Asia, would quite possibly be of interest to *APJM* readers. For example, Economist Brian Arthur's research on increasing returns and path dependencies has been very influential in research on technology management (e.g., Arthur, 1994, 1996). Although increasing returns is primarily an economics topic, it is heavily cited in management research. Papers reviewing this work and making it relevant to management research are examples of less traditional research that may be of interest to the readers of *APJM*.⁴

Similarly, it is not appropriate to summarize some work published elsewhere providing only minor changes for a management audience. We have received submissions that provided summaries of various research methods complete with steps that looked like they were practically lifted from a textbook on the subject. *APJM* sometimes does publish methodological papers, as do some other management journals, but such papers should go beyond just providing steps for conducting a given methodology. For example, if a manuscript were to discuss the value of grounded theory, it would be important to carefully define grounded theory and how it can be used in studying a particular phenomenon in management and organizational research. In other words, the author should go beyond simply summarizing the steps (e.g., Fendt & Sachs, 2008).

To improve your manuscript's chance of acceptance at *APJM*

Remember that our journal title is the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*; our mission is to publish original manuscripts on management and organizational research in the Asia Pacific region, including the Pacific Rim countries and mainland Asia. We expect that submissions to *APJM* will address management and organization theory and behavior, broadly understood to include the wide range of interests represented in the management research community. Interested readers should continue to check *APJM* for further editorials on the topic of research programs and publishing in *APJM* (Ahlstrom, 2010).

⁴ Each issue of *APJM* has a Reviews and Perspectives section as well as a Commentary section (or some combination thereof). Authors should read these sections from recent issues to familiarize themselves with the approach and style of those papers.

The present issue

In this issue, we feel happy to continue *APJM*'s tradition of publishing a range of studies that focus on topics from research sites around the Asia Pacific region. The Perspectives paper in this issue by Rabi S. Bhagat, Annette S. McDevitt, and Ian McDevitt is on improving the robustness of Asian management theories. It is an interesting paper for researchers seeking to better understand theory building and improvement in an Asia Pacific setting. We are also happy to be publishing a paper by one of the foremost authorities on emotion and organizational studies, Neal Ashkanasy. Neal and colleagues (including his former student, Yan Li) developed a model showing how organizational commitment can be improved through understanding employee emotion. Another paper by Raymond Loi and Hang-Yue Ngo addresses a related question on the mobility of employees in China. *APJM* has also been one of the early journals to recognize that there can be major differences among regions within large and diverse countries such as China; a paper on regional differences in business ethics in China by Kylie Redfern and John Crawford reflects this key idea. Forthcoming papers in *APJM* will provide further evidence on regional and cultural differences within countries such as China and India. The upside of network structures in Taiwan are also appraised in this issue in a paper by Jonathan Brookfield, as well as the downside of networks and cronyism in a paper written by Thomas M. Begley, Naresh Khatri, and Eric W. K. Tsang. In a related article by Ludwig Bstieler and Martin Hemmert, the importance of trust formation and social ties in Korea are assessed. Finally, one of the first papers in the management literature on the topic of organizational leadership in Central Asia and the Caucasus appears in this issue in a review by Kiran Ismail and David Ford Jr.

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