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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The poetry of intriguing ideas, logical arguments and rigorous methods in management



As in any other internationalized industry, writing an academic paper is a highly competitive activity in all scientific fields. Management scholars in particular, however, have our own unique challenges. As with the rest of our colleagues, we struggle to find space in different publications to spread our insights, but very often we end up delivering our products—our ideas—with serious misspecifications given our customers' preferences (i.e., the interests of each journal's potential readers).

To begin with, we can identify academic and practitioner-oriented journals that require different approaches to—metaphorically speaking—our product design, industrialization and delivery. Not only are problem statements different in both types of journals, but the language we use, the way we present our arguments and analyses, or even the paper length and format often have many disparities. So the Harvard Business Review is a great journal, but most of its contents would not find space in BRQ, and vice versa.

We can also find different goals, methodologies and even styles among scientific disciplines and management fields. One can easily identify diverse and frequently conflicting requirements, for instance, depending on whether a management journal reflects an economics, sociology, psychology or engineering perspective. Additionally, although generalist journals are usually open to methodological diversity, specialized outlets in finance, human resource management, marketing, etc., often have their own format. Even within the very same scientific tradition and management field, however, academic conversations are frequently different: no matter how original our problem statement is, different journals ask us to build our arguments based on different threads of research that may span several years.

The fact is that, over time, the number of submissions in BRQ (342 in 2017) has grown parallel to the rate of desk rejection, which is above 90%. To be sure, if the journal has the same publishing space for a higher number of submissions, the increasing rate of rejection should not be a surprise to anyone. A second explanatory factor certainly has to do with our editorial policy, which is based on low-risk revisions and short turnaround times to avoid imposing

on authors the pain of second and third round rejections. There is a third reason, however, that is probably embedded in a common observation I have often heard about our journal: considering it is a Q3, BRQ has a reputation of being a tough journal.

We have given this reputation considerable thought. I, myself, have wondered if the type of editors for whom we search has provoked a selection bias with obvious consequences on rejection rates. This could be the case, but I truly do not see how an alternative strategy of choosing less skilled and thorough colleagues could be of any benefit for BRQ. I believe we do have a great challenge, nevertheless, in addressing the intersection of two phenomena: the evolution of the scholarly publishing business, on the one hand, and the recent presence of BRQ in the international market for ideas, on the other.

Let me put it bluntly: the indiscriminate worldwide pressure to publish in any of the numerous indexed journals has generated wrong professional practices, which mainly affect new entrants such as BRQ that maintain similar standards as those of the top incumbent journals. Note that there are hundreds of journals in management-related areas, and the correlation between scientific standards and impact factor may be statistically significant but not necessarily too high. This creates many misunderstandings for scholars around the world as to what exactly journals expect from authors regardless of their impact factor.

Along these lines, taking into account that BRQ is the flagship of an academic association (ACEDE-Spanish Academy of Management) whose goals and practices have likely by far exceeded its initial size and nature when it was established 28 years ago, our expectations are indeed not shaped by the impact factor we obtain each year. It is more a question of how we see the business of science. In fact, even if we realize these standards will not protect BRQ against the possibility of type II errors (i.e., accepting papers that should not be accepted), we are convinced they differentiate peer-reviewed "scientific" research from pure anecdote. This is what I mean when I refer to how we see the business

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of science compared to other businesses in the academic arena.

So next you will find a report on how we see our business, with specific suggestions—based on my own experience as Editor of BRQ for the last four years—on how to increase your chances of publishing in our journal. As a Q3 journal for the time being, we can show a certain tolerance with regard to the originality of the problem statement, the surprise of the hypotheses, sample representativeness or the novelty of claims and implications. However, the difficult equilibrium we must obtain among the different parts of a single paper cannot lead to any tolerance at all that minimizes the relevance or credibility of what we publish.

I am sure many readers will qualify some passages below with technical nuances or even contrasted views on how a paper should be built in general. It is good to remember, accordingly, that at BRQ we will cherish your freedom to be creative and appreciate your own ideas for their intrinsic value, regardless of whether you follow all of the following suggestions. Thus, if you think “it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”.

The relevance and originality of “your problem”

A paper chance of being published in BRQ is not based as much on the paper itself but on the problem the authors chose to address—likely many years before they sent us their paper. What type of problems do we search for, anyway?

BRQ is an academic journal, which means that our readership is mainly composed of university professors whose main interest is the advancement of science, even in incremental measures. This advancement is our business. Therefore, even if we might truly enjoy reading papers about—say—Chinese crowdfunding, incentives in Colombian firms, marketing strategies in Spain or entrepreneurship rates in Poland, we will not consider them for publication unless they offer thought-provoking ideas that make Chinese, Colombian, Spanish or Polish evidence relevant to the advancement of our knowledge, respectively, on crowdfunding, incentives, marketing and entrepreneurship. To put it bluntly, the nationality of one’s evidence per se does not make a paper worthwhile.

There are, however, some caveats to this assertion. One could argue that, just as country specificities can be a source of biases that may compromise the generalization of results, they can also be a source of insights to the extent the institutional context can question long standing results that have generated a particular conventional wisdom. For instance, what we believe holds as a general rule in a particular field is sometimes the result of Western-based business evidence. In fact, political and cultural factors that are taken for granted can provoke particular results that otherwise, in a different political and cultural setting, could yield different outcomes. Let me use a trivial scientific allegory to illustrate my point:

Assume we are scientists trying to determine the boiling point of water. We have performed an experiment in a lab, for instance, in Boston, Massachusetts (USA), and we have reached the conclusion that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius (212 degrees Fahrenheit). As soon as we obtain this major breakthrough, we try to publish it in one of the top

journals. I can imagine a brief and easy title: “The boiling point of water.” Now, since we have properly explained our experiment, many colleagues will surely have replicated the methodology in—say—Seattle, São Paulo, London, Copenhagen and Rome and have reached the same conclusion: water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. These new experiments and their findings can still be published shortly afterwards, although they will probably not find a top outlet since the originality of their results is much lower. After a short period, no matter how sophisticated the experiment is and the country in which it occurs, no journals will wish to publish a paper suggesting that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. It is already conventional wisdom. . . unless someone finds something “rare” that can be linked to the conditions of the experiment. For instance, imagine we receive a paper from some colleagues in the Himalayas suggesting that, in their experiment, water boils at less than 100 degrees Celsius. They are not certain why, but they hypothesize that the pressure might have something to do with their different results given the altitude of their facilities. The title of their paper is along the lines of “The moderating role of atmospheric pressure in boiling water: evidence from the Himalayas.” These colleagues have made the “institutional context” matter in addressing an old problem statement, so they will surely find a good journal to publish their insights. Otherwise, merely replicating the experiment in the Himalayas, no matter how beautiful those mountains may be, is worthless in scientific terms.

Choosing a scientifically relevant problem statement is therefore a key issue. In a journal such as BRQ, we might not ask of you the novelty and relevance that the top five generalist journals in management may require; however, we will definitely be very demanding. We will not actually exchange methodological neatness for less-relevant problem statements. In fact, we would rather have simpler analytical methodologies that address more relevant managerial problems.

As an author myself, I realize that problem statements occasionally evolve from the beginning of our research to the moment we submit our papers. Sometimes one cannot find all the data we thought we would have available. On other occasions, we do find the data, but its quality in terms of missing values or outliers makes us choose a slightly different path. In addition, of course, even when we have all the high-quality data we desire, our analyses sometimes do not confirm our first intuitions. Indeed, many things can occur during a research project that may alter the initial goal of a specific research effort. My impression from the hundreds of submissions BRQ receives each year, however, is that many papers are still trying from the outset of the research project to prove that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.

Constructing titles to predict content, offer novelty and increase your H-Index

Editorial offices are often the first to review submissions from a formal perspective, but there is no such thing as a tense flow between editorial offices and editors. For a journal such as BRQ, papers are sent to the editor approximately twice per week in batches, sometimes once per week. For

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