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# Penetrating the Academic Publishing Machine: A Rough Guide

## ABSTRACT

*In this article, we consider the practice of publishing in academic journals. We describe the 'world of academic publishing' as it appears today, discuss contemporary rankings of academic journals and articles, specify key elements related to the academic publication process, and finally pinpoint the crucial role of reviewers within the system. We think there is an urgent need for this kind of summarizing text as early career scholars in Finland (as elsewhere) are increasingly encouraged to submit their work to international journals, often without the necessary information on how the system – the academic publishing machine – works. Publishing is a tricky and unpredictable business. There are conventions involved, and we hope that the advice and reflections contained in this article will help to smooth the route to getting ideas in print.*

Publishing in refereed international scholarly journals is of paramount importance in the life of the contemporary academic. In this article, we consider the practice of publishing in academic journals. We begin our account by describing the 'world of academic publishing' as it appears today, go on to discuss contemporary rankings of academic journals and articles, specify key elements related to the academic publication process, and finally pinpoint the crucial role of reviewers within the system.

A panel discussion on *'Publishing in Inter-*

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*national Journals'* was held at the Helsinki School of Economics on 4 May, 2006.[1] A panel of experts shared their insights on the art of publishing. The panelists represent several academic disciplines and traditions, and their presentations featured different perspectives on getting academic work published. We elaborate and extend in this article on the panel presentations and discussions.

We think there is an urgent need for this kind of summarizing text as early career scholars in Finland (as elsewhere) are increasingly encouraged to submit their work to international journals, often without the necessary information on how the system – the academic publishing machine – works. Publishing is a tricky and unpredictable business. There are conventions involved, and we hope that the advice and reflections contained in this article will help to smooth the route to getting ideas in print.

## The publishing imperative

Academic work is not only about *doing* research. It is also about *communicating* findings to other researchers, and engaging in focused discussions and debates. In contemporary academia, much of the communication between researchers takes place within peer-reviewed scholarly journals. It is important to leave a trace of your research findings in these journals so that other researchers interested in the topic at hand have a chance of taking your contribution into consideration as the discussion develops and proceeds. No trace, no need to take your ideas on board. Getting research findings published is thus based on a very practical reason. Journals not only provide quality assurance for academic work but also provide the main vehicle for disseminating research ideas and findings to targeted scholarly audiences.

A strong motive for publishing, hence, is to show that you exist as a researcher – and that you have something worthwhile to tell other researchers. However, there are, as with most things, conventions that make the publishing process more likely to succeed. This article addresses some of the key pointers that increase the likelihood of not only getting published but also in being read and cited. Crafting research findings into a communicable and accessible form is time-consuming. Writing takes a lot of practice, but it should be fun, not a burden. It should be a self-evident practice for a scholar, not a mystical and perverse ritual for impact, fame and glory.

Consequently, it is important to note that there are a lot of different actors involved in the academic publication process. *Authors* (researchers) submit their work to journals in the form of manuscripts, and *editors* of journals (usually, researchers themselves) make decisions on revising, rejecting or accepting these manuscripts, based on suggestions by *reviewers* (other researchers). Distinguished scholars form the *editorial boards* of journals, providing journals with a core of competent reviewers (or 'referees' as they are sometimes called). Others review individual manuscripts for journals on an *ad hoc* basis. All researchers usually take part in this process voluntarily, without any financial compensation. We will return to the details of the publication process later. First, it is important to place the process in context.

The world of publishing is mediated by a wider system. It is facilitated by global publishing companies as well as alternative channels



**1** We would like to thank the Research Foundation of the HSE for funding this event.

for publication. A representative of a publishing company – the *publisher* – is a key contact person for a journal editor. Major global publishing houses include Elsevier, Thomson, Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, (and Routledge), Edward Elgar and Sage. Through the books and journals they promote and publish, these corporations are key nodes in what Engwall and Kipping (2002), among others, have termed the global management knowledge industry[2].

In the panel discussion held at HSE on 4 May, Salma Azmeh[3] from Elsevier outlined the role of the publisher in the publication process. Publishers work closely with research communities and librarians, and carry out bibliometric studies, customer-, author-, editor- and reviewer feedback studies as well as studies on trends related to publications and publishing in general. Publishers invest significantly in technology, and they constantly keep score of the number of downloads and requests on particular journals and individual articles. In this way, they monitor the academic publication process.

Contrasting with this, Professor Bo-Christer Björk[4] from the Swedish School of Economics in Helsinki, discussed an increasingly important dimension in contemporary academic publishing, that of open access (OA) journals and e-print repositories. Driven partly by a challenge to the high subscription prices of mainstream publishers, OA channels include peer reviewed journals for primary publishing and subject-specific and institutional repositories for secondary parallel publishing, and thus aims to offer freely available and immediate access to published peer-reviewed research. A major argument for OA is the increased speed of turn-around times from submission to public appearance of the article in print – due to opportunities for rapid dialogue between authors, editors and reviewers. OA channels still constitute, however, only a marginal phenomenon in the global scholarly communication system (Björk 2004).

It is also important to note that academic publishing is not only about authors, editors, reviewers and publishers, it is also about academic societies and scholarly associations, which play crucial roles in relation to some of the journals. For example, *Organization Studies* is 'owned' by the European Group of Organization Studies (EGOS), the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* by the Nordic Academy of Management (NFF), and *Human Relations* by the Tavistock Institute. Academic societies thus function as the main vehicle in disseminating knowledge for large groups of scholars in business, management and organization.

## Where to publish?

Before describing and making sense of the academic publication process in detail, we would like to make a brief note here on the ranking of academic journals and their 'impact'. Aspiring researchers today feel pressure not merely to publish but to publish in 'top-tier' journals. Generally, it is the articles published in journals

**2** Many major management journals in the US in particular, e.g. the *Academy of Management Review*, the *Academy of Management Journal* and the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, are published through university presses.

**3** Salma Azmeh is Research & Information Manager with *Elsevier* (part of Reed Elsevier Group plc), a leading global multiple-media publisher of scientific, technical and health information products and services (http://www.elsevier.com).

**4** Dr. Bo-Christer Björk is Professor of Information Systems Science at the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration in Helsinki. He is founder and editor of the Open Access refereed journal *Electronic Journal of Information Technology in Construction* (http://itcon.org).

included in the ISI / SSCI[5] and similar international rankings that figure in various performance measures of academic activity in a number of countries. The higher the so-called impact factor of the journal, the higher it is appreciated in the rankings and, in consequence, the higher the 'formal' quality of the articles published in it.

There is an implicit hierarchy – which is made increasingly explicit through rankings – with respect to international journals, for example, in the field of organization and management studies. Within this stratification, US-based top-tier journals such as the *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Administrative Science Quarterly* have become the crème de la crème for European scholars, too, while UK-based journals such as the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies* and *Human Relations* enjoy a lower but still relatively high status, as do some more critically oriented journals such as *Organization*. Niche journals specialized in particular aspects of organization and management and journals edited outside the UK do not (yet) typically figure in any significant way in the SSCI. These journals are, however, well placed in some of the other rankings produced.

Today, Finnish academics are exposed to a new system of evaluation and incentives. Publishing in international journals is encouraged by department heads, deans, rectors and government officials. 'Top' research is celebrated, at least in the official discourse. Increasing emphasis on publishing has so far been a step-by-step process in Finland where role models have been found in the Anglo-American academia. The *Research Assessment Exercise* (RAE) in the United Kingdom, for example, is a periodical national assessment of research quality the outcome of which is used to determine the selective distribution of research funding. Carried out roughly every five years, the 2008 RAE is the 6$^{th}$ round of assessment that UK universities have undergone (for details, see Geary et al 2004). The RAE has been attributed with the explosion in journal ranking lists and the pressures to publish research in those journals ranked as international or better still, 'world class'.

Two issues face contemporary Finnish academics, therefore: publishing and journal rankings. As we argued above, publishing is a natural part of research work. It is about communicating findings to other researchers. Rankings, in contrast, are ambiguous and subject to political passions. They can turn into weapons in the hands of policy makers and individual researchers who are made to compete against each other.

**5** The *Social Sciences Citation Index* (SSCI) provide access to bibliographic information, author abstracts, and cited references found in over 1,700 of the world's leading scholarly social sciences journals covering more than 50 disciplines. They also cover individually selected, relevant items from approximately 3,300 of the world's leading science and technology journals. It is important to note that ISI is a product of a private company, Thomson. Journals (or more accurately, publishers of journals) apply to be included in ISI / SSCI (http://scientific.thomson.com/products/ssci).

The *impact factor* is a measure of the frequency with which the 'average article' in a particular journal has been cited in a particular year or period. The annual *JCR impact factor* is a ratio between citations and the number of recent citable items published. Thus, the impact factor of a journal is calculated by dividing the number of current year citations to the source items published in that journal during the previous two years.

Other rankings can be found in business school lists, see e.g. the Aston list (www.abs.aston.ac.uk/newweb/research/rankings/documents/alpharanking.pdf).

For a detailed evaluation and composit list of some of the most prominent lists, see Harzing (2006), available at www.harzing.com/resources.htm#/jql.htm.

Contemporary rankings of academic journals can be criticized in a multitude of ways. Firstly, 'impact factors' such as the one found in the ISI / SSCI were originally designed for the natural sciences. The main criterion for the 'impact factor' of the journal is the total count of citations each article published in the journal has attracted (in ISI / SSCI listed journals) in the two year period after their respective publication dates. In social sciences such as organization and management studies, this is a rather odd criterion. The processes of conducting qualitative fieldwork and crafting manuscripts into published articles (described below) are relatively long. For this reason, there is little time to cite very recent articles in subsequent contributions – rather, the articles that become truly influential become cited with a lag, which is built in the review processes of journals. Therefore, the key criterium in ISI / SSCI can be argued to favour journals with a particular emphasis on quantitative analysis.

Secondly, black-and-white focus on 'impact factors' is likely to lead to a lot of personal disappointments for scholars. It is already evident that particular journals are receiving an enormous amount of manuscripts, and that editors of these journals are making increasing efforts to screen the inflow before sending manuscripts out to external review (see e.g. Clark et al 2006). It does not take much creativity to figure out that the competition for getting work published in 'top-tier' journals is fierce.

Thirdly, of course, it is not a given that an article published in a high-prestige or 'top-tier' journal contributes more to knowledge than an article published in a less prestigious journal (Starbuck 2005). We would thus like to draw attention to the fact that less prestigious journals may in practice encourage more innovative contributions, while 'top-tier' journals with their fierce competition may result in a disproportionate focus on technical rigour and a formulaic presentation of ideas at the expense of creativity and novelty.

Relatedly, as more and more researchers and academic institutions are driven by rankings, the system becomes increasingly self-serving. Starbuck (2005: 180) notes: "a focus on prestigious journals may benefit the most prestigious departments or schools but add randomness to the decisions of departments or schools that are not at the very top. Such a focus may also impede the development of knowledge when mediocre research receives the endorsement of high quality." It is increasingly difficult for academic journals to break their vicious cycles in not being accepted to the most popular rankings and/or in climbing up the ranks. Virtuous cycles, in turn, may lead to the over-appreciation of particular journals. The same logic applies to different academic institutions. Fame attracts more fame, but this fame may simultaneously become detached from contributions to academic knowledge.

The fourth criticism for contemporary academic rankings is a more contextual one. Virtually all of the current 'top-tier' journals in the field of organization and management studies, to take one example, originate from the US and the UK. Needless to say, these journals are published in English. Also, the majority of the empirical data in published articles relate to the Anglo-American context. It is notoriously hard to convince reviewers in US- and UK-based journals that Finnish experience, for example, should be interesting and relevant for advancing theoretical points in academic discussions. This may be conceived of as form of Anglo-American hegemony in the production of organization and management knowledge, with which scholars from marginal contexts such as Finland are compelled to comply through a range of academic practices (for a critical assessment, see Meriläinen et al 2006). The English language and Anglophone contextual knowledge play a key role in the hegemonic practices, subtly – and sometimes explicitly – determining whose theories count and whose work is cited, whose experience is valued and whose empirical data is deemed interesting and relevant (Descarries 2003; Alasuutari 2004; Meriläinen et al 2006).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, the researcher attempting to get his/her work published faces a trade-off. On the one hand, s/he may submit to a 'top' journal and run the risk of ending up with no publication, albeit with a set of (often useful) comments on how to develop the work further. S/he can then attempt to make use of these comments, and eventually send the manuscript to another journal. On the other, s/he may submit a manuscript to a less prestigious journal, which may appreciate the original ideas and help to develop them further through a constructive review process that results in publication. Exceptions can, of course, go either way.

In practice, it is useful for a researcher to develop a portfolio of manuscripts, submitted to different journals at different points in time; a portfolio that is in constant flux. The key issue for the researcher is to learn to communicate one point or argument per manuscript, and to avoid the tendency to explain the entire world in a single text. In practice, then, it is wise to structure one's research findings to smaller chunks in order to be able to address more focused theoretical discussions. At best, this can lead to a situation where the researcher does not feel that his/her life depends on how a single text is received in a particular journal.



We now turn to a more hands-on description of the academic publication process. Although each review cycle is unique, there are conventions and common practices in academic publishing that scholars should be aware of.

## The academic publication process

The journal *editor* is a key actor in the publication process. S/he is usually the only party with all the relevant information throughout the process. Editors of journals are not lonely wolves. They are supported by a team of associate editors, and in some journals, also action editors. *Associate editors* are assigned the responsibility on review processes related to individual manuscripts, based on their areas of expertise. They do this on a constant basis. *Action editors*, in turn, are kind of freelance editors who are assigned the responsibility for manuscripts on an *ad hoc* basis, in individual cases. *Guest editors*, in turn, are assigned responsibility for specific special issues of journals (although the journal editor usually remains responsible for the final decisions also in relation to special issues). The editor's or associate / action editor's role is crucial in the sense that s/he is expected to take a clear stand on the quality of the manuscript at the various stages of the process, and decide on how the process proceeds. Therefore, s/he also holds a lot of power in running a journal. *Editorial assistants* provide the necessary practical help for editorial teams in terms of, for example, correspondence and filing.

After an author has submitted a manuscript to a journal, it is screened by the editor. This is the first moment of truth for the author. Editors typically try make the decision on whether to send a manuscript out to review or not within a week or two. The editor either takes charge of the manuscript him/herself, assigns the manuscript to an associate editor (or action editor), who takes charge of the manuscript by locating people to review it, or decides to reject the manuscript outright. There is a practical reason for the latter case: it serves everyone that editors screen out manuscripts that are inappropriate for the journal (either in terms of subject area or quality). After all, the review process can involve a considerable amount of time and effort for all the parties involved, and so an effective editor will screen out inappropriate manuscripts to ensure that sufficient resources are available to devote to those articles that are of the relevance and potential for publication.

Recently, a number of the leading management journals have explicitly taken up the issue of the review processes in editorials and commentaries (Bartunek et al 2006; Clark et al 2006; Rynes 2006; Seibert 2006). Why this sudden focus on the craft of writing for international journals? We suspect that one reason is the increase in the sheer number of manuscripts that scholars submit to journals – due to the pressures described above. A hightened emphasis on publishing by policy makers, rectors, deans and department heads has led to a marked rise in the number of submissions especially to the higher ranked journals. Academic journals thus aim to make explicit and more transparent the ways in which they run their review processes. A strong message uniting such commentaries is that there is little to be gained from submitting poorly crafted and incomplete work to journals.

The current editors of the *Journal of Management Studies*, for example, say that they desk reject approximately fifty percent of the manuscripts submitted to the journal, without sending them out to external review (Clark et al 2006). A further three per cent are returned to the authors for revision before being sent out to reviewers, so that the ”authors could do things such as: remove author-identifying information from the article, reduce the word count so that it falls within word limits (9,000 words), correct grammatical and typographical mistakes, insert missing references, clarify certain concepts and areas and further develop the contribution of the paper” (ibid.: 657). The salutory message is that an author is sloppy over these seemingly trivial issues at their peril. As Bergh (2006: 201) puts it: ”authors can help themselves by pushing harder on their ideas before the initial submission of their manuscripts.”

Following a few simple guidelines can make a significant difference on publishing success. The most straightforward piece of advice is to read carefully the ’information for contributors’ (or ’guidelines’) of the journal, usually found on the inside cover or on the journal webpage, and to comply to the requirements. Most journals now run their submission processes either by making use of e-mail attachments, or by using electronic submission systems. These systems – such as the one operated by the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (http://ees.elsevier.com/sjm) – are becoming increasingly popular. At best, electronic submission systems speed up the publishing process significantly.

After the author has crossed the first hurdle – the desk reject – the publication process continues. The publication process in academic journals is designed to ensure fair treatment for authors, and anonymity of the involved parties. Academic journals are run with double-blind review processes. This means that reviewers are unaware of the identity of the author(s) of the manuscript they review – until the manuscript is published. For authors, the reviewers also remain unidentified throughout (there are, however, exceptions on this in some fields such as economics).

For those manuscripts that are not desk rejected by the editor, three reviewers are normally involved, although decisions can be made based on two reviews. The journal editor (or associate editor / action editor) selects suitable reviewers to assess the manuscript. In practice, reviewers are identified from personal contacts and the journal editorial board, article references and conference proceedings, recommendations from colleagues, websites of universities, or database keyword searches. Reviewers set out to provide an objective assessment, and they are expected to form an opinion on whether the manuscript should be accepted, revised or rejected for publication.

Why do researchers review manuscripts for journals? According to a recent survey by Elsevier, reviewers are motivated by a duty to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and by a personal interest in new research. They like to review manuscripts that fall within their own areas of expertise. The reputation of the journal in question may also play a role. Reviewers are usually authors themselves and appreciate that the academic publication process and system would not function without their input. Reviewers are generally asked to carry out a first review of a given manuscript in four to ten weeks, depending on the practice of the journal in question.

Reviewers are usually requested to ʼscoreʼ the article on a number of criteria (e.g. contribution to knowledge, methodological appropriateness, literature review etc), write comments for the editor, and to write a detailed review for the author. Often, in practice, this stage can experience delays due to reviewers' other obligations. When the editor eventually receives all the reviews, s/he makes a decision to either reject the manuscript, to invite a revision, or accept it with minor modifications. In the *Journal of Management Studies*, for example, a further thirty per cent of papers (out of the fifty percept that are not desk rejected) are rejected at this stage (Clark et al 2006).

An invitation to revise and resubmit the manuscript can thus be considered a satisfactory outcome for the author/s at this stage. In this case, the editor prepares a decision letter where s/he summarizes key points by the different reviewers, and usually indicates whether the revision is ʼminorʼ or ʼmajorʼ. In the latter case, the editor may also clearly indicate whether s/he considers the revision to be a ʼhigh riskʼ (of subsequent rejection) endeavor. A good editor will provide clear guidance and set out for the author/s the most crucial aspects of the revision.

An insight into this process can be seen in the Editors Forum on the review process, published in the *Academy of Management Journal* (Rynes 2006). Much of the discussion revolved around revising and resubmitting manuscripts. Agarwal et al (2006) reflected on their own publishing experience in AMJ, discussing their communication with the reviewers. Their message is that it is crucial to build a clear strategy on how to deal with the different kinds of comments that reviewers provide, evaluating each comment and arranging comments to ʼblocks of reviewer concernsʼ that can then be dealt with coherently (see also Seibert 2006). Revising a text is, however, a balancing act: ″Authors need to take reviewers very seriously, but not in a manner that compromises the sanctity of their ideas" (Agarwal et al 2006: 196).

All academic journals expect authors to account for the revisions they make to the original manuscript. When they resubmit a revised manuscript, authors need to include a detailed letter indicating how they have dealt with the reviewers' concerns, and/or account for why they may have decided to ignore some comments. This is an important part of authors' communication with reviewers, and not something to be taken lightly. It is nearly always the original reviewers that review the next version(s) of the manuscript. A detailed letter indicating the scope and nature of the revisions makes the work of reviewers and editors a little easier. Most journals set deadlines for authors in revising their manuscripts, with between two and six months being the average. The rule of thumb in revising a manuscript is the sooner, the better.

When the authors have resubmitted their manuscript, and when the reviewers have eventually handed in their reviews of the revised manuscript, the editor (or associate / action editor) makes another reject / revise / accept decision. The editorial policy of the *Academy of Management Journal*, for example, is to encourage editors to make a final decision after the first revision. The editor's job can be tough. Donald D. Bergh was the AMJ action editor for Agarwal et al's manuscript, introduced above. Bergh (2006) looks back at the review process from the responsible editor's point of view, and provides an interesting account of coming to terms with mixed reactions from reviewers, and making decisions based on mixed reviews.

It is important to note here that there are differences in the traditions of US and European journals in terms of the expected length and detail of reviewers' statements. In the US, 'top tier' journals in management and organization studies tend carry a positivist legacy, and also place considerable emphasis on detailed technical and methodological accounts. In particular, in assessing the 'rigour' of a given manuscript, the methodological apparatus is scrutinised in detail. Reviewer feedback in US journals tend to be relatively long and detailed, often extending from eight to ten pages in length. In many European journals, there is less emphasis on technical and methodological details and more on novelty and innovation. Reviewers' feedback tends to be more broad brush in nature, being on average around two to three pages long. Whatever the length, however, a good reviewer always makes sure that s/he distinguishes between major and minor concerns on a manuscript. This makes the work of both the editor and the author/s easier.

If the manuscript is not rejected or if another substantial revision is not required, conditional acceptance is a decision that editors make at this stage. This refers to a set of detailed modifications that the author/s are required to make in order to have the manuscript published. Direct acceptance is, of course, another option. Sometimes, second and even third and fourth rounds of revision are carried out before the editor reaches a final decision on rejecting or accepting a manuscript. The *Journal of Management Studies*, for example, has during the last three years accepted on average a little under ten per cent of manuscripts submitted (Clark et al 2006: 658). To put it another way, the ultimate fate of over ninety per cent of all manuscripts submitted to 'top-tier' academic journals is rejection.



Summarizing the points above, it is clear that reviewers (sometimes called referees) form the backbone of the contemporary academic publishing system. The panel discussion[6] held at HSE on 4 May, 2006, focused particularly on the crucial role of reviewers in the academic publication process. The panelists set out to share their insights on two basic questions:

- How do I assess the quality of an article manuscript in the role of reviewer?
- What makes a publishable academic article?

Reviewers assume the role of gatekeepers of knowledge. They put their thumb up or down, like the Caesars of ancient Rome.

## The role and expectations of reviewers

On the HSE panel, Professor Robyn Thomas[7] presented her ideas on the basis of an informal 'straw pole' of editorial board members in several top ranking academic journals. She points out that the point of departure for many (if not all) reviewers is the classic *so what?* question. This refers to an assessment of the substantive contribution that the manuscript makes to theory. Another way to frame this is: *how does the manuscript take us beyond what we already know?* In Robyn Thomas' view, reviewers primarily look for novelty and an interesting argument. They prefer manuscripts that offer new theoretical insights rather than ones using new empirical material to illustrate an existing theory. Table 1 below summarizes key points from Thomas' presentation.

In addition to these broad pointers, editors included in Robyn Thomas' straw pole also drew attention to a number of other factors in guiding early career researchers on publishing. These include:

- Look out for 'special issues' that fit your topic and approach.
- Obtain detailed feedback from experienced authors and/or reviewers prior to submission; tell them where you are intending to submit and ask for advice.
- Comply with the journal's formal and *de facto* submission requirements.
- If possible, obtain the reviewers' check list for the journal (for some journals, these are available on the website).
- Anticipate revise and resubmit as good outcome, and have a 'plan B'.
- If it's a 'reject', remember that it is just two or three reviewers selected by the editor; revise the paper to incorporate useful feedback and submit to another journal.

In his panel presentation, in turn, Professor Juuso Välimäki[8] emphasized general interest, importance and craftmanship as the cornerstones of a quality academic publication. Corresponding with the comments made in the special issue of the *Academy of Management Journal* (Bartunek et al 2006), the key point for Välimäki is that the article makes a clear and substantive

**6** The panel discussion was chaired by Dr. Janne Tienari, Professor of Management and Organizations at Lappeenranta University of Technology, and Adjunct Professor (Docent) at the Helsinki School of Economics. Tienari is the current Editor of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (http://ees.elsevier.com/sjm), an international peer-reviewed journal published by Elsevier four times a year.
**7** Dr. Robyn Thomas is Professor of Management at Cardiff Business School in the UK. She is Associate Editor of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, and a member of the Editorial Board of *Organization* (http://org.sagepub.com) and *Human Relations* (http://hum.sagepub.com).
**8** Dr. Juuso Välimäki is Professor of Economics at the Helsinki School of Economics. He is the Managing Editor of the *Review of Economic Studies* (www.restud.com) and the former Associate Editor of *Econometrica* (www.economicsociety.org).

***TABLE 1. Key points and dimensions in writing an article***

| Dimension | Key points |
|---|---|
| **Positioning in the literature** | • **Clearly articulated aims and rationale.**<br>• **Good demonstration of knowledge of existing theory and a critical engagement with the debates.**<br>• **Statement of the limitations of such theory.**<br>• **Clear expression of how a particular gap in the literature is met.**<br>→ **Craft a well-developed theoretical framework.** |
| **Methodology** | • **Sound understanding and a review of the methodological issues.**<br>• **Clear statement of the approach taken.**<br>• **Appropriate methods (fit with the theoretical framework).**<br>• **Reasonably robust data set and sample size/observation per site.**<br>→ **Check for the 'fundamentally flawed' critique.** |
| **Findings and conclusions** | • **Robust interpretation/evaluation of the findings/data**<br>• **Carefully packaged conclusions and implications, which are linked to the rationale of the study and to existing theory.**<br>→ **State clearly what the article contributes.** |
| **Fit and presentation** | • **Fit with the rationale and mission of the journal.**<br>• **Quality of writing and overall coherence to argument.**<br>• **Correct format as laid down in the notes to contributors.**<br>• **'Typos' and sloppy referencing is taken as a sign of general lack of quality.**<br>→ **Proof read for clarity of expression and overall presentation.** |

contribution to theory. Professor Vesa Puttonen[9] shared these points, and added that editors and reviewers also look for a good read (see also Bartunek et al 2006). Puttonen referred to the ways in which articles are formulated in terms of style and argumentation skills. In this way, both Välimäki and Puttonen highlight the importance of style in an academic publication. Editors and reviewers (are forced to) read a lot, and coherence and an appreciation of the reader with a well-written flow to the argument is always appreciated.

Finally, Associate Professor Andreas Werr[10] approached the questions posed at the the panel presentation with a personal reflection. When Werr assumes the role of reviewer, he first asks whether he is, in fact, the right person to carry out the review. This is an ethical question as every author is entitled to have their work reviewed by a neutral *and* competent assessment. In similar vein to the other panelists, Werr's second step is to form an opinion on how interesting the manuscript is, particularly, with reference to its problem formulation, to its contribution in a particular theoretical debate, and to the presentation and analysis of empirical data.



**9** Dr. Vesa Puttonen is Professor of Finance at the Helsinki School of Economics. He is the Editor of *LTA / The Finnish Journal of Business Economics* (http://hse.fi/lta).
**10** Dr. Andreas Werr is Associate Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics in Sweden. He is Associate Editor of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, and the current Chair of the Management Consulting Division of the *Academy of Management* (www.aomonline.org).

The next step is then to assess the technical adequacy and quality of the manuscript in terms of its positioning in the literature, methodology, analysis and conclusions. Logic, style, structure and coherence are key issues for Andreas Werr. His list of criteria for a publishable article include:

- Constructs a clear, interesting and researchable problem.
- Demonstrates familiarity with previous research and ongoing debates.
- Addresses the problem through an adequate methodological approach.
- Draws reasonable conclusions in relation to the problem and the method.
- Spells out the significance of the findings.
- Is coherently and logically written.

## In brief

Repetition in the panelists' insights and in our description and reflection of the publication process above is intentional. There are a number of issues that are deemed by editors and reviewers to be of uttermost importance when the quality of an academic article manuscript is judged. It would thus make sense for scholars to take a step back every once in a while, and to (re)consider their publication strategies, to ask a number of questions. Firstly, what do I want to communicate to other researchers and to whom in particular? Secondly, how can I communicate my ideas? Thirdly, where do I want to communicate my ideas, in other words, in which journals? We think that the answers to these questions should be determined by the interests and passions of the researcher, not a short-sighted quest for merit and glory – although, of course, glory may come as a result of passion!



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