Jones, O., and **Gatrell, C**., (2014) The future of writing and reviewing for International Journal of Management Reviews, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 16, (3): 249–264

**Editorial: The Future of Writing and Reviewing for IJMR**

**Introduction**

Following a brief introduction in the first issue of 2014, the new editorial team would like to provide a more extended account of how we intend to develop the journal[[1]](#footnote-1). Oswald Jones and Allan Macpherson took over as editors in 2010 and Kamel Mellahi replaced Allan as co-editor in 2013. Kamel has now been replaced by Caroline Gatrell, who has served as a consulting editor and has published three recent papers in IJMR. Ossie is based at University of Liverpool Management School and his most recent publications focus on organizational learning in small firms, entrepreneurial learning, social networks, bootstrapping start-up businesses, enterprise education, and dynamic capabilities in new businesses (Jones *et al*., 2014). Caroline is based at Lancaster University Management School and her main interests are in gender and management with a specific focus on health, work and family (Gatrell, 2011; 2013).

Over the last four years, IJMR has performed very well in consolidating its position as one of the leading business and management journals in terms of impact factor. Once again, the co-editors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the previous editors, Adrian Wilkinson and Steve Armstrong, who introduced special issues to the journal. The first two issues commissioned by Adrian and Steve have been very important in raising the profile of IJMR. In 2011, the impact factor increased from 2.641 to 3.581 and the top five cited papers were from the *Frontiers of Strategic Management* (2009) and *Corporate Social Responsibility* (2010) special issues. In 2012 the top three cited articles were all from the *CSR* special issue although the impact factor levelled off a little to 3.333. We are certainly hopeful that the special issues on distributed leadership (2011), gender (2012) and research methods (2013) will continue to have a strong influence on the wider academic community. Perhaps more importantly, the journal’s higher profile should help attract attention to a wider range of papers and IJMR will not be reliant on special issues in the future. The 5-year impact factor of 4.981 is higher than six of the 19 journals currently ranked above IJMR on the Management[[2]](#footnote-2) list and higher than five of the 12 journals ranked above IJMR on the Business list. This suggests that the longer-term position of the journal should remain extremely healthy. In addition, we have a very strong editorial team (Dimo Dimov, Joep Cornelissen, Elco van Burg and Denis Grégoire) for the 2015 special issue, which deals with entrepreneurial cognition.The theme of our Special Issue for 2016 will be ‘New Developments in Translation Research’. In the call for papers on this timely and interesting topic, our guest editors (Dimitrios Spyridonidis, Graeme Currie, Stefan Heusinkveld, Karoline Strauss and Andrew Sturdy) invite varied accounts into different meanings of the term translation. The call for papers can be found on the IJMR website.

Evidence of IJMR’s increasing influence is provided by the download figures, which rose by 27% from 206,000 in 2011 to 262,000 in 2012. Particularly notable were the usage figures in China, which increased by 79% with 12,500 downloads. The recently introduced teaching and learning guides (TLGs) have also attracted attention with the nine TLGs being downloaded on more than 10,000 occasions. While the CSR papers again featured very strongly, the top ten downloads also include papers on Green Supply Chain Management (Srivastava), Distributed Leadership (Bolden), Collaborative Innovation (Greer and Lei) and Workplace Sexual Harassment (McDonald).

Macpherson and Jones (2010) set out five objectives for the new editorial team. The primary objective was to reduce the time to first decision from approximately 133 days to 60 days – and this has been achieved. In terms of meeting this target the editors are grateful for the professionalism of our managing editor, Emma Missen, the experience of our associate editors and the dedication of all those who review for the journal. We recognize that providing timely feedback to authors is central to building the journal’s reputation within the broader academic community (Adler and Liyanarachchi, 2013; Clark *et al.*, 2013). The second objective was to strengthen the group of associate editors and we now have a great team, which covers most areas of business and management. Dermot Breslin and Julia Richardson joined the team of associate editors following their awards as reviewers of the year in 2011 and 2012 respectively. In 2013, Anders Ortenblad and Andrea Ordanini stepped down from their associate editor role. We would like to thank them for their valuable contribution to the Journal and are pleased they remain with us as consulting editors. We are delighted to welcome to the associate editor team Sharon Mavin and Umit Bitichi who joined in January 2014.

The third objective was to strengthen IJMR links to the British Academy of Management and have certainly tried very hard to do so in a number of ways. Wiley-Blackwell introduced virtual special issues linked to each of the BAM special interest groups (SIGs). The co-editors have also been committed to raising IJMR’s profile amongst BAM members by arranging ‘meet the editors’ sessions at the annual conference and presenting publishing workshops at the doctoral symposium. The fourth objective was to encourage members of the consulting editorial board to take a more active role in promoting the journal. While we have involved consulting editors in decisions related to special issues, we have certainly been less active in involving the consulting editors in activities designed to raise the profile of the journal. With this in mind, there have been some changes to our board of consulting editors. We would like to thank those who have decided to step down and welcome those colleagues who have joined the team. The editors encourage all board members to be actively involved with developing and promoting the Journal. The final objective concerned raising the profile of IJMR by ensuring at least one of the co-editors or associate editors attended all the major international conferences including AoM, ANZAM, BAM, EGOS, EURAM and OLKC. While we have endeavoured to ensure that there has been IJMR representation at major conferences, it is difficult to establish the extent to which this has contributed to either more or higher quality submissions.

Corbett *et al*., (2013: 1349) claim that all editorials belong to one of three generic types: 1) statements on editorial policies; 2) statements on the content of the journal; and 3) statements on how to publish in the journal. As with the approach adopted by Corbett *et al.* (2013), this editorial touches on all three generic issues. We begin by outlining the benefits of writing for IJMR and then discuss the importance of reviewing for maintaining the quality of papers published in the journal. We then review the last four years of IJMR and move on to outline our ideas about writing more analytical literature reviews.

**The benefits of writing for IJMR**

Given the challenges of getting published in a high quality journal such as IJMR, we considered it important to reflect upon the many benefits of deciding to write for IJMR. These benefits, we argue, are rich and diverse both from the perspective of individual scholars and with regards to the field of Management and Organization Studies (MOS) more broadly. We consider that IJMR offers scholars an exceptional chance to reflect upon and evaluate their specialist areas, creating solid foundations upon which to build debates with the prospect of directing future research agendas. Looking broadly at the management and organization field, we contend that literature reviews have a key role to play. To quote work-family scientists Benson *et al.* (1992: 65): ‘Without the literature review, theories would remain hopelessly isolated from one another and bodies of empirical research would become mere laundry lists of findings’.

We assert that literature reviews are essential for making sense of existing scholarship and to identify new research directions. In considering why writing reviews is beneficial from an individual career perspective, we turn to Webster and Watson’s (2002) Guest Editorial for MIS Quarterly: ‘Analysing the past to prepare for the future’. Webster and Watson acknowledge that their (2002) paper is centred on criteria for publication of reviews in MIS Quarterly. They do, however, make the observation that ‘much of what we say has general value for literature reviews’ (Webster and Watson, 2002: xiv), a sentiment with which we concur. Particularly helpful, in our view, is the focus on temporality and the related identification of key points within scholarly careers which ‘lend themselves naturally’ to writing a literature review (Webster and Watson, 2002: xiv; see also Baumeister and Leary, 1997). Webster and Watson define such key points as occurring when subject specialists have a clear and substantial overview of their field, which facilitates the identification of patterns and gaps within the literature. Having a clear overview enables scholars to articulate and spotlight areas where the research field may most ‘fruitfully direct its attention’ (Webster and Watson 2002: xiv, see also Baumeister and Leary, 1997). Bearing in mind their focus on temporality, Webster and Watson indicate two groups of scholars for whom the writing of an extensive literature review is most appropriate. Both of these groups are in an ideal situation to submit their work to IJMR. On the one hand, potential IJMR authors may be experienced researchers who have completed a literature review prior to leading a major research project. On the other, they may be early career scholars who have a clear and up-to-date knowledge of an existing body of literature, such as those who have recently completed their doctoral studies (Baumeister and Leary, 1997).

From our perspective, as co-editors, we consider the development of a literature review for IJMR presents an ideal opening for these two groups to take stock of their respective fields and to develop papers that set the agenda for future research. We suggest there might be synergies for collaborations between more experienced scholars and early career researchers to produce jointly written reviews. IJMR has published some high-quality, impactful reviews co-authored by PhD graduates and their supervisor (Akinci and Sadler-Smith, 2012), articles co-authored between principal investigators and their research teams (Thorpe *et al.,* 2005), and sole-authored articles by recently graduated PhD students (Lee, 2009). Collaboration between early career and more experienced scholars helps fulfil aims among learned societies to build capacity within the academy, as well as reflecting the ambitions of UK research councils. The benefits of junior/senior collaborations thus extend beyond the goals of the Journal and are advantageous to the future of the field of management and organization studies.

*Interdisciplinarity*

In addition to early career scholars, their mentors, and principal investigators about to embark on new research projects, we add another group of prospective authors for whom writing a review for IJMR offers inviting possibilities. As a new editorial team, we are deeply committed to IJMR’s interdisciplinary and inclusive approach, which has, since the journal’s inception, enabled scholars to introduce insights deriving from other disciplines into management and organization studies (Bell and Davidson, 2013). Our commitment to interdisciplinary research remains firm because papers previously published in IJMR show convincingly how this approach opens up new possibilities for creative and imaginative research trajectories within relevant fields. For example, Wood *et al*., (2008) draw on sociological perspectives to develop a policy-relevant paper on ageing and working lives; Breslin (2008) integrates Darwin’s ideas on evolutionary change into the study of entrepreneurship; Kelloway and Barling (1999) examine the implications of children’s work for organizations and society. As Wood *et al*.’s paper shows, producing a literature review for IJMR can offer scholars who are interested in (or located within) other disciplines a unique platform for their research arena within management and organization studies. Such opportunities are particularly beneficial (from the perspective of both journal and authors), if the literature review reflects developments from other disciplines that are not usually integrated within management and organization studies and, thus, offer new directions for debate and future research. For example, introducing ideas from a socio-cultural perspective may shed a new, and different, light on issues identified as unresolved within management research.

A review of interdisciplinary literatures may not provide ‘answers’ but could assist in breaking down disciplinary silos and offering alternative outlooks on matters that have previously received limited attention within management journals. So, for example, Özbilgin *et al*.’s (2011) IJMR review of literatures on ‘work-life balance, diversity and intersectionality’ fuses research strands from organizational psychology; feminism; gender and sociology. In so doing, Özbilgin *et al*.’s paper observes a gap in work-life balance literatures and presents an argument that researchers should be more cognisant of marginalized groups that have previously been excluded from such debates (which had traditionally centred on work-rich heterosexual couples). The publication of their review offered these authors a springboard from which to develop their arguments in a subsequent IJMR review: ‘An Emic Approach to Intersectional Study of Diversity at Work: A Bourdieuan Framing’ (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). Similarly, Gatrell’s (2011) transdisciplinary review, ‘Managing the Maternal Body’, provided her with a platform for the introduction of socio-cultural constructions of maternity and work to the management and organization studies arena. The publication of Gatrell’s paper in IJMR also had an immediate impact within MOS and facilitated a subsequent empirical publication in *Human Relations* (Gatrell 2013).

Having identified the scholarly groups that could most obviously benefit from writing ‘state-of-the-art’ literature reviews, we now suggest two prospective types of review that meet important criteria for publication in IJMR. The most obvious juncture at which scholars might look to produce a major literature review would be when their topic area has reached a stage of maturity meaning that an ‘accumulated body of research exists that needs analysis and synthesis’ (Webster and Watson 2002: xiv; Baumeister and Leary, 1997). In this category we include research fields where there are obvious gaps, or where there are disciplinary silos, meaning there are no synergies between related research arenas [for example among and between organizational psychology and the sociologies of family and work life balance, as in the previous example of Özbilgin *et al*.’s (2011) paper]. Equally, authors might review literatures in an emerging, or rapidly changing arena, which is sufficiently mature to warrant a review, but where there is potential for developing stronger ‘theoretical foundations’ (Webster and Watson 2002:xiv). This has been illustrated over time by a number of ground-breaking papers which have influenced the field of MOS (Burrell, 1988; Sarasvathy, 2001).

**Reviewing for IJMR**

While a strong flow of good papers is important to ensure that the journal continues to thrive, the role of reviewers is also central to maintaining journal quality. Many reviewers take their task extremely seriously and provide first-class feedback even when recommending a paper should be rejected. Other reviewers are less conscientious, or less professional, and this can create problems for the editorial team as well as authors themselves. We recognise that this is not a problem unique to IJMR as many journal editors regularly bemoan the quality of reviews (Drotar, 2011; Caligiuri and Thomas, 2013). We believe that engaging in the review of other authors’ work is fundamental to the role of any academic (Treviño 2008). Clearly, the system of blind peer review is absolutely central to ensuring the quality of papers published in the best journals (Lepak, 2009). At the same time, agreeing to review a paper is important to the reviewer as well as to the author. Undertaking regular reviewing duties helps ensure that academics are aware of current ideas in their own fields of study.

The quality of any journal is reliant on the willingness of reviewers to give their time freely. The vast majority of IJMR reviewers do provide extremely helpful and rigorous feedback for authors. The co-editors are generally gratified by the quality of reviews and the insight reviewers contribute to improving IJMR papers. However, it is worthwhile restating what editors (and associate editors) are looking for in a good review. The first, and most obvious, issue is that reviewers should be familiar with the content of the journal for which they are reviewing. For example, we do not expect that all IJMR papers should make a theoretical contribution to knowledge. We do, however, expect authors to have something original, interesting and insightful to say about the field or topic they are reviewing. It is important that reviewers provide a reasonable amount of feedback and that means more than a short paragraph. Caligiuri and Thomas (2013: 550) in their analysis of peer reviews for the *Journal of International Business Studies* suggest that the best reviews were on average 1403 words compared with the less effective reviews, which averaged 438 words. They also mention that the ‘best reviewers’ did not make an obvious recommendation (such as ‘reject’). Specific recommendations constrain the editorial decision, which may involve balancing very different opinions about the quality of a particular paper. Based on their analysis of the best reviews for JIBS, Caligiuri and Thomas (2013: 551) provide five suggestions for writing an excellent review:

1. Focus the review on the potential contribution - reviewers should pay real attention to helping authors by identifying what must be done to realize the paper’s potential.
2. Offer details about the strengths and weaknesses of the paper – weaknesses are relatively easy to identify and reviewers should also try to highlight the paper’s strengths.
3. Offer specific and constructive feedback for ways to address problems – in addition to offering a critique, good reviewers provide constructive guidance to authors about how to improve their manuscript.
4. Evaluate your objectivity and ability to review before agreeing – reviewers should disclose professional relationships with authors before agreeing to review a paper with which they are familiar.
5. Improve the mechanics of your review – providing a numbered list of the main points is a useful way of helping authors deal with a critical review of their work.

Paltridge (2013) points out that even though reviewing is the ‘cornerstone’ of academic publishing there are very few guidelines for how new scholars learn to write reviews. For the last two years, the IJMR editors have been offering ‘a learning to review PDW’ (professional development workshop) at the annual BAM conference. While the workshop has proved very popular, it is open to a very limited numbers of participants. It is important that young scholars (including PhD students) should begin by reviewing conference papers and working papers. Such an approach is most useful if they can compare their own reviews with those of more experienced scholars. For example, reviewing for the Academy of Management conference is very revealing (for most UK scholars) as it demonstrates the seriousness with which young US-trained scholars take the reviewing process. Therefore, it is perhaps worth considering whether developing reviewing skills should be formally incorporated into the training of doctoral students.

**IJMR: the last four years**

Rousseau *et al*. (2008) provide a useful distinction between traditional literature reviews and systematic research syntheses. Traditional reviews focus on a number of key papers around which secondary studies are integrated to provide a summary of a particular concept, theory or subject (see Baumeister and Leary, 1997). This type of review can make a significant contribution to knowledge by exploring prior empirical research and theoretical developments. Contributions include identifying gaps, weaknesses or puzzles in a particular research theme and establishing a basis for future research. Traditional reviews are usually a fundamental element in MOS doctoral theses and are usually a precursor to empirical work. At the time of the 2010 editorial, most authors had used a traditional approach to review the literature. Over the last four years a greater proportion of the papers published in IJMR have been based on the principles of a systematic literature review (Tranfield *et al*. 2003). In part, this stems from greater awareness of the technique amongst the academic community. The editorial team have also encouraged authors to include a discussion of their ‘research methods’ even when adopting a traditional approach to the literature. We believe that readers should be informed about how the material included in all IJMR papers was identified and analyzed. Macpherson and Jones (2010) suggested that authors should refer to a paper by Denyer and Tranfield (2009; 679) that identifies four core principles for systematic literature reviews (SLR) in management and organization studies: transparency, inclusivity, explanatory and heuristic. These principles underpin five steps in carrying out the review:

Step 1 Question formulation

Step 2 Locating studies

Step 3 Study selection and evaluation

Step 4 Analysis and synthesis

Step 5 Reporting and using the results

In terms of analyzing the literature, Mays *et al*. (2005) suggest four different approaches: narrative, qualitative, quantitative and Bayesian meta-analysis. Rousseau *et al*. (2008) outline four different types of narrative analysis; aggregation, integration, interpretation and explanation. Others suggest that qualitative research can be reviewed using narrative synthesis, meta-ethnography or realist synthesis (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006). As stated in an earlier editorial (Macpherson and Jones, 2010: 110): ‘In short, decisions need to be made on the meaning, quality and type of evidence to be assessed (Denyer and Tranfield 2009) and the form of research synthesis that is to be conducted (Rousseau *et al*. 2008)’. Despite the fact that many authors adopt a systematic approach – it is still evident that a significant number of papers published in the journal adopt a descriptive rather than an analytical approach to the literature.

Macpherson and Jones (2010) also suggested that papers of a more conceptual nature would, in the future, be considered for publication in IJMR. It was pointed out that a number of such papers have strongly influenced the MOS field (Child, 1972; Burrell, 1988; Whittington, 1996; Sarasvathy, 2001; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). It was also stressed that if such conceptual papers were to be published in IJMR they would need to be grounded in a thorough discursive analysis and review of the literature. The challenges for authors undertaking such a project include the identification of a mature body of work, establishing the study boundaries, explaining development of the area with reference to key papers as well as providing a real conceptual contribution which encourages *new* research questions (Macpherson and Jones, 2010). At the time, it was made clear that it was not the co-editors’ intention to publish papers containing propositional models of the type published in the *Academy of Management Review* (*AMR*). Developing conceptual papers which review, synthesize and challenge existing theory is a complex task. Since 2010 very few conceptual papers have been published in IJMR and this remains an area which could contribute to the future development of the journal. The best examples of conceptual papers are Friesl and Larty’s (2013) study on the replication of organizational routines and a review of Foucault’s work on biopolitical variations (Munro, 2012).

The number of papers submitted to IJMR is currently approximately 300 per year and that figure has remained constant since 2010. While at one level this appears to be extremely healthy, the raw numbers are deceptive because of the high-level of desk rejections, which also have remained constant at about 80% (see Kilduff, 2007; King and Lepak, 2011). What this means in reality is that approximately 60 papers actually enter the review process. On one level this situation has some advantages because we try not to ask reviewers to read papers that clearly have little chance of publication in IJMR. In most cases, the decision to desk-reject is relatively straight-forward as a significant proportion of the rejects are inappropriate because they contain empirical material, are too short (less than 5000 words,) or they are conceptual papers which do not draw on an established body of literature (generally, these papers are also very short). In most cases, it is quite clear that the authors of such papers have not studied the author guidelines nor read any recent IJMR papers. This is certainly not uniquely an IJMR problem because the editor of *Technovation*, Jonathan Linton (2012), recently wrote an editorial entitled: ‘How to get your papers rejected (or not)’. He discusses the outcome of a workshop attended by a group of editors who all complained about the high number of desk rejects. Linton goes on to say that most editors would prefer a smaller number of excellent papers with low rejection rates. Billsberry (2014: 4) also provides a list of 10 ways to avoid a desk rejection and notes that the failure to provide a contribution in the form of anything ‘sufficiently new or innovative’ is the most common reason for rejection from the *Journal of Management Education*.

With regards to IJMR, there is a relatively small group of papers (between 30 and 40 annually) that are desk-rejected after very careful consideration by the editorial team. Such papers are generally prepared to a professional standard, an appropriate length and make a reasonable attempt to review an established body of literature. There are a number of reasons why such papers are rejected: 1) the topic may not be appropriate for a general management journal; 2) the paper may deal with a relevant topic, but coverage of the literature is limited or too dated; 3) the paper is based on an inappropriate form of analysis such as bibliometrics; 4) the paper reviews a field which is not mature and the literature is drawn from lower rated journals; 5) the review is highly descriptive and there is no attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of the literature (see below). Papers which fall into this category are reviewed by both co-editors before a decision to desk-reject is made. On some occasions, papers are passed on to an associate editor for their expert views on a topic such as marketing or strategy. Rather than being rejected, this group of papers may be ‘unsubmitted’ by the co-editors to enable the authors to revise and resubmit their work. A decision to unsubmit will be taken if a papers appears to have real potential for publication but is lacking in some obvious area such as – no references from the last two or three years, no attempt to outline a research agenda, or an inadequate explanation of how the research was carried out.

As IJMR publishes approximately 24 articles per year approximately 30 papers are rejected after one or more round of reviews. Most rejections occur at the first review stage - although in 2010 23% were rejected after a second round of reviews and a further 9% at the third review stage. In 2011 and 2012 only two papers were rejected at the second review stage and none were rejected at this stage in 2013. Since 2010, the co-editors have tried hard to ensure that the review process is rigorous in ensuring that good papers are published in the journal and those with limited potential are rejected so that authors can develop their work for submission elsewhere (see Corbett *et al*., 2013). Based on our analysis of rejection letters from associate editors these are the main reasons why papers were not considered suitable for publication in IJMR:

* Weak analysis of the literature – too descriptive (21%)
* Poor coverage of the literature with major gaps in key areas (17%)
* Focus of the paper unclear and key concepts poorly defined (13%)
* Paper did not make a unique contribution (12%)
* Paper too similar to existing literature reviews (9%)
* Topic too broad/narrow and paper poorly organized (7%)
* Omitted key journals from review (5%)
* Methods poorly explained or inappropriate (5%)
* Limited research agenda (5%)

All rejected papers had at least two of the flaws indicated above – no paper was rejected on the basis of one major weakness. In many cases the authors of rejected papers were commended by both the associate editor and reviewers for attempting to respond to the earlier criticisms of their work. At the same time, it was generally felt that authors had not paid enough attention to all the points raised by the reviewers of their work. Therefore, although this might appear to be an obvious statement it is very important that authors attempt to respond to all the main points raised by the reviewers. If authors are unclear about what is expected of them in revising their work then they should seek clarification from the associate editor.

As stated above, the editors would like to attract more high-quality papers and discourage authors from submitting work that clearly does not fit with our objectives. One factor that may discourage authors from undertaking a major literature review concerns IJMR’s status as the only leading journal that publishes extensive reviews of the literature. Authors may feel that preparing a lengthy literature review for IJMR is high-risk, since rejection means that there are limited alternative outlets. This topic is also discussed by King and Lepak (2011) who challenge the ‘myth’ that theory papers submitted to the *Academy of Management Review* (AMR) are difficult to place in other journals. The authors found that over 40% of papers rejected by AMR were published in other top journals (King and Lepak, 2011: 207). Most leading journals in management and organization studies do publish literature reviews and, in many cases, these are very highly cited papers. There is certainly no reason why high-quality reviews of the literature cannot make a genuine contribute to knowledge and consequently have the potential for publication in leading journals (see Alvesson, 2010; Jiang *et al*., 2013; Kraalijenbrink *et al*., 2010; McGovern, 2013; Matthews and Marzec, 2012; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Zott *et al*., 2011). All these papers are literature reviews which have been published in leading 3\* and 4\* business and management journals (and we would have happily published all these papers in IJMR).

**Writing an Analytical Literature Review (for IJMR)**

We now extend this discussion by outlining what we are looking for in a ‘good’ IJMR paper. It is not our intention to describe how to write a literature review as there are a number of publications which deal with that topic in detail (Hart, 1998; Jesson *et al.*, 2011; Ridley, 2012). Leading journals often include editorials in which the basic issues of style and presentation are discussed as well as the more complex topic of how to make a theoretical contribution (Fulmer, 2012; Delbridge and Fiss, 2012; Özbilgin, 2010; 2011; Corbett *et al.*, 2013). Booth *et al.*, 2012, 1-17), for example, provide a useful account of why reviewing the literature is important from a research perspective. We briefly discuss the range of approaches by which authors can undertake the analysis and review of an existing body of literature. Booth *et al.* (2012) also describe a number of literature review taxonomies based on different techniques for synthesizing the data. Drawing on what they describe as the SALSA (Search, AppraisaL, Synthesis and Analysis) framework the authors list 12 different types which vary from a ‘scoping review’ in which there is a rudimentary attempt at synthesis to the ‘gold standard of a systematic review’ (Booth *et al*., 2012: 26-27). As editors, we believe that all papers published in IJMR must make a contribution to knowledge in their own right and, therefore, should be analytical rather than descriptive. As mentioned above, there are a number of publications that set out the criteria for writing an analytical literature review (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Mays, 2005, Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Rousseau *et al*., 2008). Hart (1998) provides a good starting point for thinking about how to ‘map and analyse’ the literature. For example, as a basis for an analytical literature review authors could use a table to record data drawn from each paper included in the article (Hart, 1998: 146).

**Table 1 Summarizing the Literature**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Publication**  **Date** | **Theory or standpoint** | **Evidence** | **Core argument** | **Core citations** | **Type of analysis** | **Nature of sample** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Combs *et al.* (2010) point out that most research methods textbooks concentrate on identifying the sources of information rather than providing guidance on how to evaluate the literature (see Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008, Chapter 3). Based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), the authors develop an interactive model to facilitate the development of literature reviews. The authors’ selection of Vygotsky (1978) is significant because he saw learning as a reciprocal experience between student and advisor (for example). Hence, rather that developing a literature review as a solitary activity, the interactive literature review process (ILRP) is an ‘engaging, cooperative, dynamic, and interactive process’ (Combs *et al*., 2010: 161). While this model is designed to facilitate interaction between students and their PhD advisors, it could certainly be used by teams of authors working on a literature review. There are three core stages which provide the basis for developing a high-quality analytical literature review:

* *Exploring the literature – identifying key themes*

This stage should include both qualitative and quantitative techniques which are aimed at finding information and identifying themes.

* *Formulating a focus: selecting/deselecting themes*

The writer evaluates the analysis carried out at the previous stage as a means of organizing the themes and providing a focus for the review itself.

* *Analyzing/interpreting/integrating literature*

The themes and sub-themes are explored as the writer establishes the credibility of sources and attempts to identify gaps and missing information.

Team members move on to discuss the writing-up stage and preparation of a draft literature review. This document should then be evaluated and consideration given to whether there are major gaps in the review and the extent to which the material should be re-written during the revision stage.

Probably the most widely used approach in MOS is the ‘traditional narrative review’, which is based on informal mechanisms for organizing and analysing the literature (Hammersley, 2001). Traditionally, narrative reviews begin with a small number of articles and books, which are then used to identify key authors and other articles that are related to the particular topic. For example, in developing the literature for his own PhD, Jones (1995) was, initially, influenced by critical theorists such as Burrell and Morgan (1979), Beynon (1973) and Braverman (1974). Because the topic concerned R&D scientists (Jones, 1996) the work of Latour and Woolgar (1979) was also important in opening-up literature related to the nature of scientific discovery. Current PhD students are more likely to start their literature reviews with a keyword search of a well-known database such as EBSCO. While it is important to encourage doctoral students to adopt the principles of a systematic review, the majority of PhDs continue to be based on the traditional narrative approach. We acknowledge that there will always be a place in *IJMR* for narrative reviews, as long as authors are able to provide real insight into the literature (as advocated by Baumeister and Leary, 1997). The journal contains some excellent narrative reviews: Akinci and Sadler-Smith’s (2012) historical review of intuition in management leads to suggestions for a number of promising future research directions; McDonald (2012) examines 30 years of research on workplace sexual harassment to identify a number of managerial actions. Narrative reviews are also published in leading journals such as *Human Relations*, for example, Alvesson (2010) provides a very stimulating review of self-identities in organization studies.

In recent years there has been increasing focus on the nature of evidence-based management and this certainly has implications for reviews of the literature (see Rousseau, 2014). This is particularly relevant in the case of systematic literature reviews, which originated with the medical sciences (Tranfield and Denyer, 2003). The systematic approach has gradually replaced narrative reviews as the most popular technique adopted in *IJMR* papers and an excellent example is provided by Turner *et al’s* (2013) review of the ambidexterity literature. McGovern’s (2013) systematic review of ‘contradictions at work’, published in *Sociology*, identifies a number of fundamental flaws in the literature that led him to call for a ‘moratorium on further usage’. As pointed out by Briner *et al*. (2009) ‘Systematic reviews have become fundamental to evidence-based practice and represent a key methodology for locating, appraising, synthesizing, and reporting “best evidence”’. However, a recent analysis of 13 systematic reviews in the health literature found very few examples that explicitly drew on research findings to suggest changes to practice (Boaz *et al*., 2011). As Briner *et al*., (2009) acknowledge, assessing the nature of multidisciplinary management research is likely to be more complicated than establishing an evidence-base from series of clinical trials, which are based on similar criteria. Denyer *et al.* (2008) make reference to the CIMO model which is strongly linked to the concept of ‘evidence-based management’ and underpins what the authors describe as ‘design propositions’:

*C (Context*) – which individuals, relationships and institutional settings, or wider systems are being studied?

*I (Intervention)* – the effects of what events, actions or activities are being studied?

*M (Mechanisms)* – what are the mechanisms that explain the relationship between interventions and outcomes? Under what circumstances are these mechanisms activated or not activated?

*O (Outcomes*) – what are the effects of the intervention? How will the outcomes be measured? What are the intended and unintended effects?

In addition to the systematic literature review, a number of other approaches have been developed in the medical sciences (Denyer *et al*, 2008). Meta-ethnography, meta-narrative, realist synthesis and meta-analysis are all strongly associated with literature reviews in medicine. Before discussing the various forms of review it is worth mentioning debates about the philosophical underpinnings associated with particular approaches to research. As Rousseau *et al.* (2008) point out, there are alternative views of science based on variations in ontology and epistemology. Ontological concerns are related to ideas about the extent to which the world has an objective reality beyond an individual’s subjective perceptions. Epistemology concerns are related to assumptions about the nature of knowledge; in particular, the extent to which it is possible to obtain objective data by which to ‘measure’ or quantify social phenomena. Burrell and Morgan (1979) drew on Kuhn’s (1962) work to argue that management research could be divided into four paradigms based on two dimensions. The horizontal axis is based on assumptions about the nature of science (epistemology and ontology) which is labelled the subjective-objective dimension. The vertical axis is grounded on assumptions about the nature of society in terms of a regulation-radical change dimension. Based on these two dimensions, Burrell and Morgan (1979) identified four distinct ‘sociological’ paradigms: functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist. This debate has recently been ‘revisited’ in IJMR by Shepherd and Challenger (2013) who argue for the adoption of ‘rhetorical analysis’ as a technique for reconciling paradigm incommensurability in management research. Hassard and Cox (2013) also revisit debates about the nature of organizational theory by developing three paradigms, structuralist, anti-structuralist and post-structualist. According to the authors, the ‘new’ post-structuralist paradigm ‘is underpinned by a qualitatively different set of intellectual assumptions to those reflected in traditional sociological perspectives directed at analysing agency and structure’ (Hassard and Cox, 2013: 1717).

For the purpose of illustration, these differing assumptions about the nature of social science can be summarized *via* a simple continuum from constructionism to positivism with a mid-point occupied by critical realism (Reed, 2005; Al-Amoudi and Willmott, 2011). We accept that there is no single view of positivism (or, indeed, of constructionism/critical realism). Broadly speaking, however, positivists accept that the collection of empirical evidence can lead to the verification of observable laws. To simplify, positivists apply the principles of natural science to the study of social phenomena. In contrast, constructionists do not subscribe to the idea of a universal reality that is separate from an individual’s perceptions. Whereas a positivist science is based on quantitative techniques, constructionists generally adopt qualitative approaches to research (interviews, observation, ethnography). Rather than establishing the ‘truth’ through the collection of objective data, constructionists are much more concerned with improving the understanding of human experiences. Increasingly, critical realist approaches have been developed in an attempt to span the ‘irreconcilable’ gap between positivism and social construction. Critical realism is based on the view that there is an objective reality – but it is mediated by individual perceptions and cognitions (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004). Research approaches in the critical realist tradition often adopt mixed research methods, which attempt to combine qualitative and quantitative evidence. This brief overview of the major research paradigms are illustrated in Figure 1, which also indicates the approximate position of the various approaches to reviewing the literature. We briefly outline each of these methods and indicate their suitability as a basis for developing papers suitable for publication in IJMR.

**Figure 1 Research Paradigms and Review Techniques**

*Meta-ethnography* – is based on the synthesis of qualitative research following the selection of appropriate empirical studies. The studies are subjected to repeated reading to identify the key concepts adopted by previous researchers (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Synthesis of the data is based on three techniques: first, reciprocal translation, which involves the comparison of concepts used in the sample studies. Secondly, refutational translation is concerned with identification of conflicting concepts. Thirdly, a ‘line of argument’ synthesis means that the analyst attempts to identify similar patterns across the studies under consideration (Dixon-Woods *et al*., 2005).The objective of adopting a meta-ethnographic approach to the literature is to provide greater clarity regarding both the empirical results of previous studies and the nature of concepts and theories adopted by researchers (see Campbell *et al*., 2003; Mays *et al*., 2005; Thorne *et al*., 2004).

*Meta-narrative* – is similar to a realist approach in that meta-narratives include both qualitative and quantitative studies. This approach is based on the Kuhnian (1962) concept of a research paradigm in which there is agreement about a coherent set of assumptions and methodical approaches. Meta-narrative approaches to reviewing the literature adopt the principles of pragmatism, pluralism and historicity. Greenhalgh *et al*., (2005) demonstrate the meta-narrative technique by examining 13 ‘research traditions’ associated with the diffusion of innovation in health service organizations. Studies within the sample are evaluated for their validity and relevance in order to make useful recommendations for practitioners and policy-makers. Some writers have suggested that meta-narratives are consistent with a constructionist view of the world (Wong *et al.*, 2013). Others infer that the approach has much stronger similarities with a realist philosophy of knowledge (Greenhalgh *et al*., 2005).

*Realist synthesis* – usually involves the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative research data (Rycroft *et al*., 2012). This approach is based on a realist philosophy of knowledge which accepts that there is an objective reality, but reality is filtered through an individual’s perceptions (Bhaskar, 1979). Realist syntheses focus attention on the relationships between context, interventions, mechanisms and outcomes [CIMO] (Pawson, 2002). What this means in practice is that a specific set of mechanisms will lead to certain outcomes when operating in a particular context (see Wong et al, 2013). For example, Dieleman *et al.* (2009) suggest that HRM interventions will improve the performance of workers in low income counties.

*Design Synthesis* – Denyer *et al.* (2008) describe the design synthesis approach, which is also based on the principles of CIMO and was ‘inspired’ by the work of Simon (1996). Simon’s idea led to the distinction between explanatory sciences, which have a strong theoretical orientation, and design sciences, which are more concerned with practical problem-solving (Van Aken, 2004). As Denyer *et al*. (2008: 395) go on to state: ‘design science research in management aims both to develop knowledge, to design *interventions* to solve improvement problems and to design *systems* (emphases in original) (coherent structures and processes) to solve construction problems’. Selection of papers begins from the pragmatic principle of what works and the literature is then synthesized to develop a nascent theory to explain links between the CIMO elements. The next stage is to make an in-depth analysis of the literature to ‘test, revise and refine’ the initial theory (by focusing on context, interventions, mechanisms and outcomes in each study). The overall objective is to identify a number of ‘design propositions’ that are useful for practitioners. For example, a certain intervention (or interventions) will invoke generative mechanisms that will lead to certain outcomes in a specific context (Denyer *et al.*, 2008: 407).

*Meta-analysis* – is based on the statistical analysis of quantitative studies and is firmly located within the positivistic research paradigm. Such an approach is extremely unlikely to be appropriate for IJMR unless, as indicated above, it is used as the basis for a narrative account of why the findings are significant or important (Barrios *et al*., 2013). O’Boyle et al. (2012), for example, carry out a meta-analysis of 78 articles with a total sample size of 80,421 to statistically test the relationship between family involvement and firms’ financial performance. Golicic and Smith (2013) examine the relationship between environmentally sustainable supply chain practices and firm performance based on 31 studies and a sample size of 15,160. Unlike O’Boyle *et al*. (2012) who did not find a statistically significant link between family involvement and performance, according to Golicic and Smith (2013:91), ‘Our results showed that environmental supply chain practices were positively associated with firm performance’. A small number of bibliometric papers that combine quantitative and qualitative analysis have been published in IJMR (Vogel and Guttel, 2013; Keupp *et al.,* 2012). Our view is that a bibliometric approach can provide the starting point for an analytical review by rigorously categorising and organizing key themes in the literature. However, we will not publish bibliometric papers which are simply based on a quantitative analysis of the literature as such an approach certainly does not meet one of the key criteria for publication in IJMR:

Is there a synthesis and evaluation of the accumulated state of knowledge in that field, summarizing and highlighting current and emerging insight, while stressing strengths and weaknesses of prior work?

Papers that adopt a bibliometric approach in isolation from a narrative-based account of the findings will be unlikely to provide real insight into the accumulated state of knowledge in a particular field (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2008). As Baumeister and Leary (1997: 316) point out, good literature reviews must be an integrative endeavour and ‘a literature review which simply describes a series of studies on some topic has not achieved enough to warrant publication’. Lists of evidence, no matter how well crafted, cannot substitute for analytic and logical reasoning (see Sutton and Staw, 1995) Authors of bibliometric papers considering IJMR as an outlet should certainly refer to the two papers mentioned above as they provide a template for incorporating bibliometric analysis into an IJMR paper.

Greenhalgh *et al*. (2005) discuss what they regard as the difference between a *review*, which summarizes the literature, and a *synthesis*, which is a technique for producing knowledge. As the authors go on to state: ‘In any taxonomy of review methods, critical emphasis must be placed on the technique to achieve synthesis over and above summary (Greenhalgh et al., 2005: 428). According to Mays *et al.* (2005), *review* refers to the whole process of bringing together a body of evidence while *synthesis* refers to the stage where evidence is extracted from the original sources. Hence, in the meta-analysis approach statistical techniques are used to identify causal relationships between variables or concepts. Techniques used to synthesize qualitative data for reviews of the literature include ‘grounded theory’ and ‘cross case analyses’. Critical realist reviews that attempt to combine the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data use techniques such as content analysis or Bayesian meta-analysis (Greenhalgh *et al*., 2005). Our view is that the distinction between review and synthesis is more complex than suggested by the authors and is strongly influenced by both the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the authors. Therefore, we suggest that thinking about the different approaches to the review as illustrated in Figure 1 provides a useful starting point for considering how to approach a body of literature.

What is interesting about approaches that extend the traditional narrative and systematic literature reviews is that there is little evidence of their adoption by MOS scholars. Even within the field of medicine, where these approaches originated, there are limited numbers of studies that adopt the more innovative techniques. We believe that this presents a real challenge to the academic MOS community. The concept of ‘evidence-based management’ (EBM) has driven the adoption of newer approaches to literature reviews in medicine. Our view is that EBM should be considered by scholars in MOS particularly given the increasing importance of the impact agenda in UK universities. However, it is not the only reason for utilising newer techniques that have the potential to provide more effective tools for analysing the existing literature. As pointed out by Webster and Watson (2002), a successful literature review provides a solid foundation for advancing knowledge by facilitating theory development (see Rousseau *et al*., 2008). Booth *et al.* (2012: 12-13) suggest that literature reviews offer ‘multiple opportunities’ to engage with theory such as creating ‘meta-models’, generating theory ‘*de novo’ or* providing a data set against which existing theories can be tested. Certainly, in our role as editors we would like to see greater emphasis on analysis and less reliance on description in papers published in the journal. We also believe that it is a challenge to the MOS community to experiment with a wider range of approaches to reviews of the literature and we would certainly be interested to hear from authors who are experimenting with less conventional forms of literature analysis. In fact, the journal has an important role to play in encouraging authors to experiment with more innovative approaches to reviews of the literature. This is a skill which IJMR can nurture in a similar way to the *Academy of Management Review’s* role in encouraging theory development[[3]](#footnote-3). If the MOS field is to move forward then adopting more rigorous approaches to reviewing the literature could make an important contribution. As indicated above, there is plenty of scope for improvements in the quality of papers submitted to the journal. The most common reasons for rejection at the review stage are weak analysis of the literature, limited coverage of the literature and the main concepts are poorly defined (see p??).

We acknowledge that suggesting that the field can only move forwards by improving the way in which we look backwards could be regarded as a contradiction (Webster and Watson, 2002). We also recognize that, while the collection of empirical data is important in advancing knowledge, there will always be a place for those individuals who can make sense of confusing and conflicting evidence: ‘theory construction as disciplined imagination’ according to Weick (1989: 516). For example, Klag and Langley (2013: 149) discuss the importance of what they describe as the ‘conceptual leap’: generating abstract theory from empirical data. Although the authors are primarily concerned with the analysis of qualitative data, a conceptual leap can emerge from reviews of the literature. Klag and Langley (2013) also make reference to the way in which creative scholars act as ‘bricoleurs’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). As the authors point out, engaging deeply with the data (or the literature) and then stepping back and taking time to reflect ‘seems to help ideas coalesce to generate insight’ (Klag and Langley, 2013: 161).

In summary, the majority of MOS scholars operate within what Kuhn (1962) describes as ‘normal science’, in which the field moves forward by incremental steps rather than as a result of paradigm-shifting breakthroughs. Therefore, improving our techniques for better understanding insights provided by existing research is, in itself, an important goal that will continue to be a guiding principle of IJMR.

**Conclusions**

In a paper that reflects on their time as editors of the *Journal of Management Studies*, Clark *et al.* (2013) also discuss the future challenges facing all journals. Not least of these challenges is the issue of ‘open access’, which will fundamentally change the traditional publishing ‘pay-to-read’ business model by removing some of the ‘pay-walls’ that protect the digitized content of academic journals (Clark *et al.* 2013: 1364). At present in the UK, prestigious journals within management and social sciences are tending towards the ‘Green’ model of open access, whereby publication may still occur at no cost to individual scholars or their institutions, but papers are embargoed for a given period. The Green access model is the one currently operated by IJMR and our publishers Wiley Blackwell. As yet, the long-term impact of Open Access publishing on journals and their rankings is unknown. What we can be sure about, however, is that the quality and future prestige of a journal will continue to rest with those scholars who engage with the journal. The quality of papers, of reviews, and the effort made by those involved as authors, reviewers and board members, to demonstrate relevance and to raise awareness of new papers will all contribute to the long term success of IJMR.

As Editors, we take very seriously the standing of the Journal. We plan to actively engage with the academic community and learned societies (and will encourage our board members to do likewise) to raise the profile of the Journal. We remain committed to a quality and timely review process. We aim to continue to pursue a policy of decision-making that is fair and in the best interests of the Journal, and we will seek to attract the best and most influential papers to IJMR. Our focus remains interdisciplinary. As Editors we shall (like the Journal of Management Studies, Clark *et al.* 2013) look to share the insights in review papers published in IJMR not only within Management and Organization Studies, but within disciplines including sociology, psychology, economics and others.

Finally, we shall positively encourage authors and board members to be increasingly pro-active in promoting the Journal. We hope that board members will represent the Journal at international conferences and we will seek to increase levels of hands-on support from authors. As such we shall be asking authors to promote their papers in a style which makes these more widely accessible within management and other scholarly communities *via* teaching and learning guides, pod-casts and the dissemination *via* Wiley-Blackwell, of new papers to individual scholars within authors’ own scholarly networks. We look forward to a busy and productive time as co-editors and will do all we can to enhance the prestigious status of IJMR and the British Academy of Management.

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Figure 1 Research Paradigms



1. We gratefully acknowledge the help of Tim Clark, David Denyer and Allan Macpherson for commenting on earlier versions of this paper. Any errors are the responsibility of the authors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The *International Entrepreneurial Management Journal* and the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* do not currently have 5-year impact figures. The former is ranked number 4 in business and management while the latter is ranked number 10 in management. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We thank Tim Clark for this suggestion [↑](#footnote-ref-3)