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TRIPLE-ACCREDITED, WORLD-RANKED



# **Future-proofing *IJMR* as a leading management journal: reach, relevance and reputation**

Dermot Breslin, Jamie Callahan and Marian Iszatt-White

## **Welcome to the Roaring Twenties (again)**

Emerging from a decade rocked by global warfare and a pandemic, the 1920s were an era of dramatic social, technological, and economic change worldwide. Women enjoyed newfound freedoms (including the right for many to vote), the Jazz Age commenced, technology improved communication and transportation on a mass consumerist scale, and the economy boomed. It was a decade of breaks with tradition and modernity for the masses, in which no frills practicality, combined with the emergence of celebrity as an aspirational mirror on life, gave a sense of freedom and possibility. It also saw the advent of commercial aeroplane travel and a consequent broadening of cultural horizons.

It is easy to make comparisons between the Roaring Twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today as the world looks to recover from decades of war in the Middle East and arguably one of the worst pandemics in modern history. Once again, technology - and particularly digital technology - has played a vital role in shaping new expectations and as societies seek to 'build back better' we are looking at significant breaks with tradition. Ironically, air travel may be an element of daily life that is slow to (re)emerge this time around as we continue to battle with the aftershocks of Covid-19. As with the 1920s, the nostalgic buzz and excitement associated with the emergent post-Covid era camouflages many of the accompanying challenges that we now face, both in society and in academia.

*IJMR*, first launched in March 1999, is also entering its Twenties. For most of us, this is a period in our lives of increasing maturity, a developing sense of who and what we are, and a growing confidence to pursue our goals with determination and purpose. As a new editorial

team, we feel the same sense of maturity and purpose in our stewardship of this leading journal. Entering what is thus an important period both for the journal and for the management research community more widely, the Roaring Twenties of our own era, we are collectively facing a number of considerable challenges which have the potential to change the publishing landscape for some time to come.

The first of these challenges relates to the changing working environment we find ourselves in as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This global crisis has impacted the way we do research, and with this, opportunities to publish in high impact journals. On the back of this, and with virtual working likely to become a routine part of our lives even post-lockdown, the question arises as to what it means to be ‘global’ and how, as an international journal, we can ensure that our reach truly encompasses research and readers from around the world. The second challenge relates to the arrival of Open Access publishing, and the likely knock-on effect this will have on research processes, policies and practices within business and management. There are some genuine affordances of Open Access that the academic community should actively embrace, but there are also some challenges that we need to address. Finally, as we face the challenges of a changing work environment and the advent of Open Access, we need to ensure that past successes and an excellent track record as a leading management reviews journal are not only maintained but enhanced in the face of a changing environment.

This editorial will explore these challenges and offer our strategy for finding opportunity for success. As Editors-in-Chief, our emphasis will be on expanding the *reach* of the journal to international audiences, enhancing the journal’s *relevance* by staying on the cutting edge of management trends, and amplifying the journal’s *reputation* by leveraging our metrics without losing sight of our focus on fundamentals. Focusing our efforts on reach,

relevance and reputation, we look forward to the opportunities ahead in our own Roaring Twenties.

### **A New Era, A New Team**

We write this editorial as a new team of three Co-Editors-in-Chief. Jamie Callahan, has recently joined the team, bringing with her rich experience as a former Editor of *Human Resource Development Review*, and with a publishing track record that spans journals such as *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies*, *Violence Against Women*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, and *Organization*. Marian Iszatt-White has acted as Associate Editor for *IJMR* since 2018, giving her a thorough understanding of *IJMR*'s aims and aspirations, and was Guest Editor-in-Chief for a special issue on Philanthropy published in the July issue this year. She has published in a range of journals central to the leadership discipline, including *Leadership*, *Management Learning*, *Organization Studies* and *Journal of Business Ethics*, as well as in *IJMR*. Finally, Dermot Breslin continues as Co-Editor-in-Chief, having been in post since 2017. He has helped to steer the journal through a period of unprecedented progress and success, and continues to anchor the team in its strong roots of quality and impact. The staggering of editorial tenures at *IJMR* has ensured that we retain some continuity with past strategies and practices whilst opening up opportunities for new editorial directions, making this a particularly exciting time in the life of the journal and one which lends itself to far-reaching reflections.

Since its launch over 20 years ago, *IJMR* has become well established within the wider European research community. Since 2013, the journal's impact factor (IF) has seen a steady year-on-year increase, to reach 13.419 (2-year IF) in 2020. Globally, this puts *IJMR* 2/153 and 3/226 for the Business and Management research categories respectively, in an environment where the number of journals in both categories has again increased. This is also the highest IF

for a Business and Management journal outside the US. During the same period, downloads have increased from 270,000 to over 550,000, and the readership of the journal has become global in its reach. It is a measure of the ongoing success of the journal that the decision has been taken to move from two to three Co-Editors-in-Chief to keep pace with the advances in both quality and quantity that have been made in recent years.

## **Current challenges to the publishing landscape**

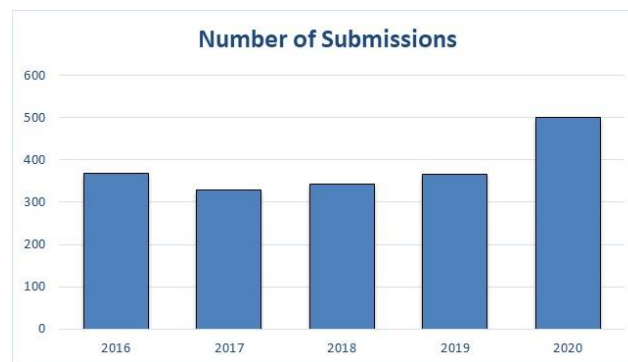
### *A changing working environment*

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has turned the academic world on its head. Whilst we all hope for a day when our lives will return to normal, the pandemic may have a longer lasting impact on the way we work, with less overseas travel, fewer face-to-face meetings, and the possible continuation of blended forms of teaching. First the cancelation of face-to-face teaching, and consequent move to online learning, has increased workloads for many academics. These rapid changes have particularly hit those at the early stages of their careers, as junior colleagues tend to carry the heaviest teaching loads. Second, the closure of schools and social support facilities have impacted the working lives of academics who have caring responsibilities. For parents of primary or secondary school children, home schooling made it difficult to find the time and space for research and writing. Those who have caring responsibility for older or disabled family members found that the day care and home support services were no longer as available; as a result, they encountered an increased burden of caring. This shift has disproportionately affected women (Deryugina, Shurchkov and Stearns, 2021). Third, the shift to working from home has changed the way we work and the richness of our interactions with colleagues. Whilst home working may have removed the burden of the commute for many, it limits opportunities to discuss our research through ad hoc meetings and conversations with others. As a result of these factors, different groups of academics have been

impacted in different ways, with early career researchers and carers feeling the brunt of the crisis.

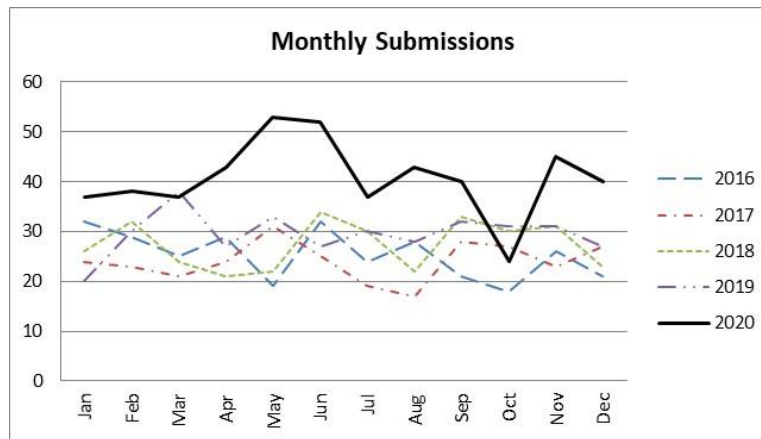
At *IJMR*, we have seen the immediate impact of the Covid-19 crisis on both journal submissions and reviewer activity. To begin with, we witnessed a dramatic increase in journal submissions in 2020, up over 50% on pre-Covid rates (see Figure 1). This change shows that some groups of scholars are clearly using the opportunity of home working to write and submit papers.

Figure 1. Total number of annual submissions to *IJMR* between 2016-2020



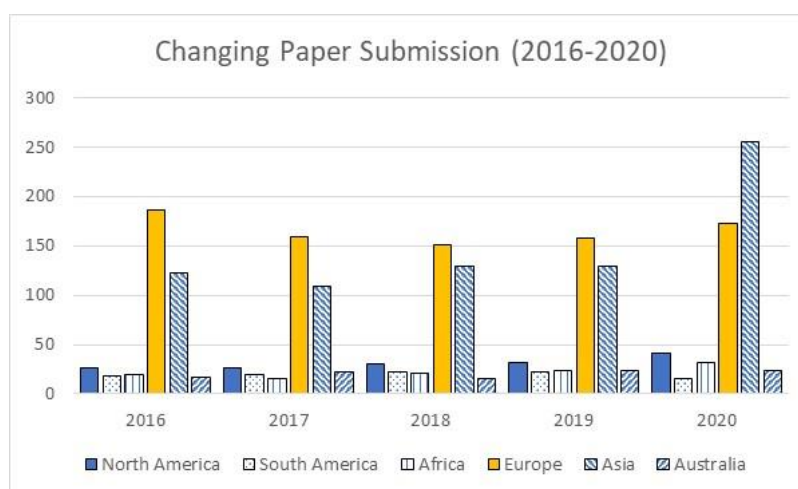
Looking at the monthly submission rates in 2020, the majority of these additional submissions coincided with the first wave of national lockdown periods in the UK and Europe from March to July 2020 (see Figure 2). The fall in submissions in October indicates a shift in priorities towards teaching, with the arrival of the Autumn semesters. Such dramatic changes in monthly submission rates are new developments not seen in previous years.

Figure 2. Monthly changes in submissions to *IJMR* (2016-2020)



Looking at a breakdown of submissions across geographic regions, submissions from North America, Europe and Africa all increased by different amounts (28%, 9% and 39% respectively). These increases were dwarfed by submissions from Asia, which almost doubled between 2019 and 2020 (see Figure 3). Submissions from South America on the other hand, decreased by 27%. These figures hint at differences in how the Covid-19 crisis has impacted academic communities across different regions. Despite these changes, our focus on maintaining the quality of submissions did not alter, with desk rejection rates remaining at 80% (a figure which has stabilised since 2017).

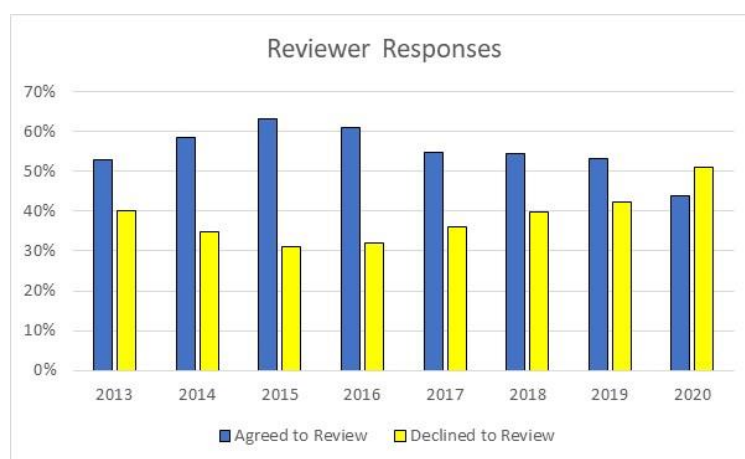
Figure 3. Geographic distribution of paper submissions to *IJMR* between 2016-2020



Alongside an increase in submission rates, we have seen a decrease in the response rate from reviewers invited to review for the journal. Figure 4 shows a general trend over the past

six years towards fewer scholars accepting invitations to review, with a ‘decline to review’ rate of just over 30% in 2016, increasing to over 50% in 2020. Thus for the first time, the majority of those invited to review in 2020 declined the invitation, with the pressures of Covid clearly contributing to this trend. Reviewers play a critical role in shaping and developing the contribution of papers at *IJMR*. These unsung heroes spend so much time and effort on the peer review process for little obvious reward or recognition (Breslin et al., 2020). As a result, many journals and conferences have introduced reviewer prizes, such as the ‘Reviewer of the Year’ award at *IJMR*, and there have been wider initiatives to recognise efforts in this area. Publons, for example, was launched in 2012 and presents a log of verified reviewer records. Reviewing is also a gateway into editing, and three former ‘Reviewer of the Year’ award holders at *IJMR* are now part of the editorial team. Yet despite these efforts, academics have become less likely to review over time. This trend presents a challenge for the timeliness, representativeness and rigour of the peer review process.

Figure 4. Reviewer responses at *IJMR* to agree or decline to review for 2013-2020



The increasing bureaucracy and performativity of academic life is another important factor here. For example, for many UK institutions, their 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission will have been significantly bigger than the previous REF because ‘all’ of their academic staff were ‘required’ to publish. As publishing becomes a requirement for more



academics, and in particular publishing in high calibre outlets, the role of editors in shaping the content of the journal may become even more important (intentionally or unintentionally, and with both good and bad consequences). On this basis, *IJMR*'s shift to a three-person editorial team is likely to be important for the sustainability of the journal through our complementary (but different) interests and our overlapping succession planning, both of which serve to safeguard the broader appeal of the journal.

### *The advent of Open Access*

Since the turn of the Millennium, there have been growing pressures from funders and policy makers for Open Access publication of research, and as a result, the traditional funding model of journals through institutional subscriptions (e.g. university libraries) is being challenged. The shift to online publication of journals as well as hard copy served as a precursor to Open Access, but the notion of a 'journal' structured into complete 'issues' remained intact. The subsequent move towards fully fledged Open Access is leading to a shift in focus, away from journals, to individual articles, as the main 'currency' of publishing. In the Open Access model, publishing revenues become directly proportional to the number of articles published, putting pressure on publishers, and thus journals, to increase output. As a result of these changes, some journals could face a considerable drop in revenue. At the same time, university librarians are focusing more on journal analytics (e.g. journal-level citations, downloads etc.) to manage their serials collections.

This change may have profound implications for the way research is managed in institutions, in the same way that the previous 'subscription model' has shaped our research environment. For example, journal citation indexes and rankings arose, in part, to help institutions decide which journals to subscribe to. These measures were seen to be needed at a time of growing numbers and types of journals on offer. These rankings have since been co-opted by universities to make decisions on hiring and promotions, with profound implications

for academic careers, and the wider direction of research (Anderson, Elliott and Callahan, 2021; Callahan, 2018). The impact of Open Access will be particularly marked for early career scholars, or scholars from lower ranking universities, since Open Access shifts the burden of funding from university libraries to individual academics with the latter being expected to pay the fee to publish their paper. Higher ranked universities may be willing to pay these fees for staff, with lower ranked universities being less willing or less able. Similarly, junior staff may struggle to obtain funding for this compared with more established colleagues.

The advent of Open Access can also be expected to impact on where we choose to publish and how we decide, due to the different timeframes associated with building a track record. In the past, it was not unusual for it to take years, or even decades, for a traditional journal to achieve A\* status, but this may be different for new Open Access/online only journals. The changing funding model for publishers and institutional funders brought about by Open Access may again shift the research landscape, changing the way we carry out research, and the type of research we value. As a result of these influences, the future publication landscape may look very different.

On the one hand, these changes present a serious challenge to publishers' funding models, with drives for more papers to be published and for stronger journal analytics. Consequently, publishers are looking to expand into new geographic markets, and increase the efficiency of the peer review process, with a focus on turnaround times, peer review times, etc. On the other hand, these changes emphasise the growing power of the individual article, and especially those papers which are highly cited and downloaded. From an editor's perspective, this highlights the importance of each paper, with an emphasis on quality, impact and contribution. There is a potential tension between quality and quantity here, with high impact journals such as ourselves needing to balance the commercial need to maintain a strong pipeline of papers with the academic importance of ensuring this doesn't come at the cost of a decline

in paper quality. For *IJMR*, this is of particular significance given the strong progress we have made in building both the quality and the impact of our journal in recent years.

### *Maintaining the momentum of positive change*

Success is, in itself, a challenge. With a strong track record over our entire 20-year history, and remarkable advances in recent years, *IJMR* can stake a claim to being a leading journal in the field of theory-based review papers. The requirement that every paper we publish should deliver a theoretical ‘strategic platform’ (*IJMR* author guidelines: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>) that advances our understanding of the topic area and offers new perspectives for its future development is, we believe, unique amongst our fellow review journals. It stands as a solid foundation for the strength of our rankings, impact factor and downloads. Our openness to a wide range of review methods, and our encouragement to authors to be bold and innovative in their theorizing, have also contributed to our success by maintaining our broad appeal at the same time as ensuring our papers consistently offer challenging and impactful contributions. But we are by no means resting on our laurels. To meet the challenges discussed above, and to ensure that we continue to lead the way for theoretically grounded review papers, *IJMR* is determined to continue its focus on fundamentals – something we hope will be reflected in further advances in our rankings across the globe and other metrics over time. As an editorial team, this translates into focusing our attention on the three Rs of Reach, Relevance and Reputation.

### **Reach – ensuring ‘international’ means ‘international’**

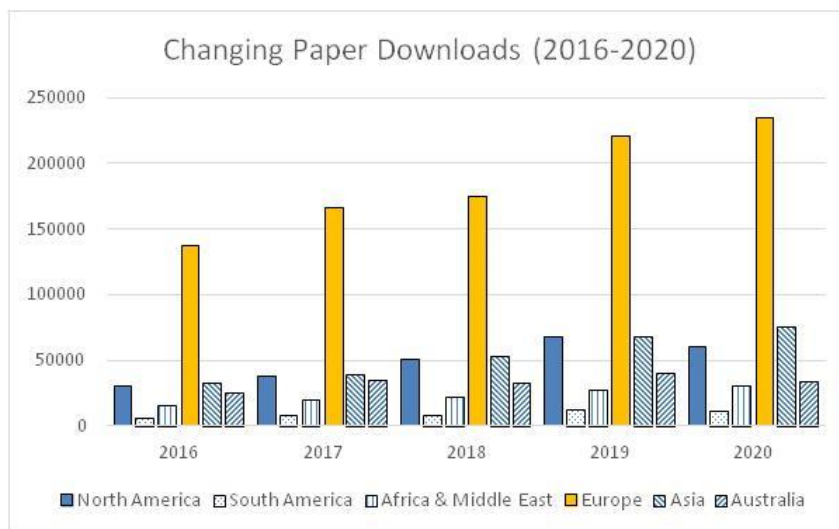
#### *Global for authors, global for readers*

Whilst we are firmly positioned as a top-tier European journal, our submissions are becoming increasingly international, with large recent increases from Asia in particular (see Figure 3). This rise of Asia as a new powerhouse of academic writing is not yet reflected in our

publication statistics. Most submissions from this region have been desk rejected due to the descriptive nature of literature reviews submitted, and hence their failure to address our publication criterion for conceptual contributions. We will be addressing this issue by hosting workshops and provisioning of other/additional support resources to develop authors internationally. We are particularly keen to support scholars who identify as part of historically overlooked, misrepresented or colonized groups, including the Global South scholarly community, in order to build an international body of knowledge and scholarship in line with our remit.

In terms of our readership, a geographic breakdown of full text downloads over the past five years shows strong increases across all regions, with this increase being partly attributable to our expanded use of marketing and social media to raise our profile globally (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Geographic distribution of *IJMR* full text downloads between 2016-2020



This includes blogs and articles on LinkedIn, posts on Twitter, video abstracts and virtual special issues. The latter highlight the impact of our published papers across a range of themes, such as the recently published virtual special issue on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis (see Bailey and Breslin, 2021). Articles within this SI have had over 1,200 downloads in the 12 months since it was published in late June 2020. Going forward we seek to further expand both

authorship and readership in regions outside Europe, strengthening our presence and profile in North America, Asia and Australia.

#### *Strengthening the editorial team*

Expanding our reach in terms of submissions and readership will require us to expand the reach of our editorial board as well. Whilst we already have a solid editorial board, with a good geographical spread, the current range, scope and volume of submissions make it time to bring on board new members. We have already made important changes to our editorial team over the past year. As well as increasing the Co-Editorial team from two to three, we have increased our Associate Editor team to include 13 experts across a range of disciplines, based in seven different countries and four continents. These additions reflect the increasing breadth of both our submissions and readership patterns noted above.

As further new members come on board in the coming months, it will be important that we provide them with the training and support they will need if we are to maintain our current high standards. Lower rates of reviewer engagement will require a more active editorial board to support the peer review process, and to ensure we continue to receive three reviews for each peer reviewed paper. The pro-active involvement of board members in reviewing activity also helps to ensure consistency of quality in the review process. We also recognize the use of social/digital media and wider connections within BAM as important mechanisms for anchoring our editorial board as a thriving and supportive community.

#### *Enhanced capacity building for PGRs and ECRs*

*IJMR* continues to be a home for the work of PhD students (PGRs) and early career researchers (ECRs). Given the challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis, the need to provide support and development to early career academics as they prepare to submit to the journal is ever more important. This is especially the case given reduced opportunities for ECRs to engage with colleagues face-to-face at conferences and through ad hoc encounters at work. The

challenges for junior scholars are not insignificant, and it becomes more important for journal editors to play a role in developing capacity within the wider system. We will therefore continue to call on our editorial team to deliver and contribute to developmental workshops, ‘Meet the Editor’ sessions and research seminars in the coming years. *IJMR* has a strong presence through such events in major conferences including AOM, BAM, EURAM and EGOS, and has delivered numerous virtual events across the globe in the past year. We see growing opportunities to develop enhanced support and development of PGRs and ECRs - for example, in delivering workshops on how to write for this journal or to develop theory through literature reviews - across the globe.

### **Reputation – getting the word out**

#### *Increasing the impact of publications*

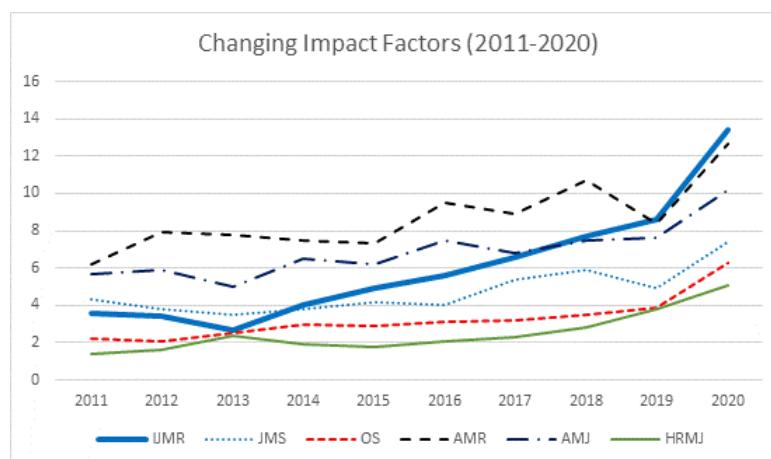
In the same way that journal ranking lists have shaped the research landscape since the turn of the Millennium, current moves to Open Access may shape future landscapes in the coming decades. Whilst the ‘subscription model’ targeted research quality measures at the level of the journal (e.g. A-ranked journals), Open Access shifts the emphasis to individual articles. As a result, the journal in which a paper is published may no longer be relevant as a proxy for quality. Instead individual articles will be quality assessed based on their own merits, regardless of where they are published. This shift harks back to a former era, in which individual outputs, not necessarily the publication outlet, mattered more.

The salience of the quality of individual papers underpins *IJMR*’s focus on the fundamentals of publishing, and on the quality and integrity of the peer review process. We give primacy to our publication criteria, seeking to offer opportunities to publish without prejudice to author gender, career status, institutional affiliation, geographic region or disciplinary background. For example, *IJMR* remains an outlet for doctoral students both as

sole authors and part of author teams. Fundamentally we look for innovative papers which have the potential to significantly impact a field of study. Our papers not only review a field or topic area, but develop theory within that field, and we welcome the wide variety of innovative approaches our authors have taken in theorizing through their reviews (see Breslin and Gatrell, 2020).

The importance and significance of theory-driven reviews is reflected in the high citation scores for such papers. Over the past 10 years, most journals in business and management have seen increases in impact factors (IF), due to a number of factors such as higher publication rates (i.e. more journals publishing more papers), and a tendency in these publications to cite more recent research. However, *IJMR* has seen an above average increase in its IF, resulting in the impressive IF and rankings already noted in the introduction to this editorial, and shown in Figure 6 below.

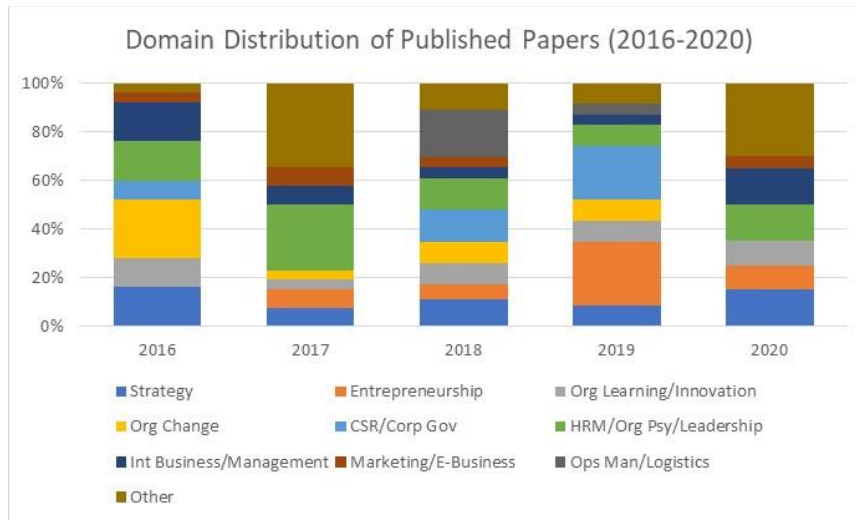
Figure 6. Changing Impact Factor of *IJMR*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Human Resource Management Journal* between 2011 and 2019



In addition to publishing reviews which advance theory, *IJMR* is also a generalist journal, with no precedence given to any one discipline or domain (Gatrell and Breslin, 2017). Figure 7 demonstrates that the core topic of published papers covers a wide range of areas,

from strategy and entrepreneurship to HRM and organizational psychology. The journal also encourages papers which are interdisciplinary in nature (Breslin et al., 2020).

Figure 7. Changing Domains of Published Papers (2016-2020)



A unique feature of *IJMR*, which we believe contributes positively to its overall impact, is that it is the only review journal in business and management which publishes special issues focusing on one topic area. Elsbach and van Knippenberg (2020) suggest that it can be challenging to ensure there are no overlaps in the papers published, and that the literature can only be mined a limited number of times before significant additions to scholarship are required for it to be productive to produce a further review, but we believe special issues offer scope for increased depth and breadth that adds value to the field. It will be interesting to see how the advent of online publishing of individual articles impacts on the notion of a special issue format.

Finally, *IJMR* publishes literature reviews which adopt a wide spectrum of review approaches from bibliometric analysis and systematic literature reviews to narrative reviews (Jones and Gatrell, 2015). Recent research has shown that systematic reviews have become the new normal for review methods, however the degree of systematicity varies widely across



papers (see Hiebl, 2021). Whilst other journals give preference to certain approaches (e.g. integrative reviews at *Academy of Management Annals*), *IJMR* continues to be agnostic in its approach to review methods. In so doing, we also leave the door open to novel and creative approaches.

#### *Increasing the volume of high-quality submissions*

Alongside the impact of individual papers, we seek to increase the volume of high-quality articles that we publish. To support this growth, our editors regularly engage in paper development workshops and ‘Meet the editor’ sessions across the globe. We have a presence at major conferences, and as noted above, we aim to expand further into key North American and Asian markets in the coming years.

We also recognise the implications of different key journal ranking lists—such as CABS, ABDC, and FT50—for attracting high quality submissions. As shown above, *IJMR* has seen a dramatic increase in its Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) IF over the past ten years (see figure 6), surpassing all journals ranked 4 and 4\* in the CABS journal ranking list, with the exception of the *Academy of Management Annals*. Whilst these gains have not yet been realised in *IJMR*’s rankings in some lists, we remain hopeful that the journal’s metrics and distinctive quality positioning will eventually be recognised more widely. We suspect, though, that these processes are subject to path dependencies and related self-reinforcing mechanisms beyond our control (Sydow et al., 2009).

Whilst we see our ranking in these key journal lists, as important to attracting more high-quality submissions, we remain focused on the fundamentals which underpin measures of quality rather than ‘chasing’ such measures for their own sake. This involves continuing to publicise our positioning as a theory-driven review journal, and working with all our stakeholders (authors, readers, publisher, associate editors, etc) to further develop an in-depth understanding of our remit, processes, and standards. In this way, we seek to sustain and build

on our strong performance over the past decade. We believe these moves will over time raise our profile and presence in key areas.

### *Differentiation from the Field*

Literature reviews have had an increasingly important place within business and management research over recent years. Journals such as the *Academy of Management Review* (AMR), *IJMR* and *Human Resource Development Review* were set up to focus exclusively on review articles as important vehicles for taking stock of developments within the field. More recently, and perhaps as a result of the direction AMR has taken towards theory papers, *Academy of Management Annals* (AMA) was set up in 2011. *The Journal of Management* devotes two issues each year for review papers, and other journals occasionally publish literature review papers (e.g. *Journal of Management Studies*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*).

In this increasingly crowded field, it is important for us as a journal to differentiate our offering if we are to continue to receive a strong pipeline of quality submissions. The strong theoretical underpinnings which drive all our papers, and the new strategic directions they offer for future development, constitute a genuinely unique selling point for *IJMR* as a review journal. Further, our impact factor supports our claim to be a leader at what we do. As noted above, an important focus for the future will be around raising our presence and profile in North America and Asia, and doing more to ensure broad based understanding of our theoretical remit. Collectively, these measures and approaches will continue to underpin our reputation as a leading reviews journal.

### **Relevance – staying on the cutting edge of emerging trends**

*New initiatives that enhance our offering*

As has already been noted, alongside its many benefits, Open Access poses a significant challenge to the current subscription model. In responding to that challenge, it will be important for *IJMR* to meet the business need to maintain a sustainable revenue stream without compromising our high academic standards. We will need to be creative in our approach to future revenue generation, at the same time as ensuring the ongoing rigour of our review and publication policies and practices. We already have a number of initiatives in train to address these competing issues, which will both strengthen our focus on theory-driven reviews and complement these with other types of papers. In 2020 we introduced two new sections within the journal. Debate essays give contributors the opportunity to continue discussions within the journal, by writing short articles in response to recently published reviews (see Breslin and Bailey, 2020). The core aim of these essays is to expand and deepen theoretical discussions emerging from a published review. In addition to debate essays, we also introduced literature review methods papers, as a much-needed contribution towards filling the gap in this publication space currently (Kunisch et al., 2018). We believe that both these special sections - outlined in more detail below - will make an important contribution to enhancing our appeal to both authors and readers, and hence enhancing downloads, at the same time as staying firmly aligned with our core remit.

#### *Debate essays – enhancing engagement*

In this issue, we present the first of our debate and response essays. In 2020, Soto-Simeone et al. presented a review of new venture survival (Soto-Simeone et al., 2020), in which they synthesized more than five decades of research exploring the reasons some new ventures survive and others fail. In their debate essay, Coad and Storey criticize this framework for basing venture outcome on skill - something that can be influenced by entrepreneurs and other stakeholders (Coad and Storey, 2021). Instead they set out the Gambler's Ruin model in which new venture performance is a random walk and exit depends on access to financial resources -

chips. Soto-Simeone et al. respond to this critique by arguing that the distinction between survival and performance matters when thinking about the antecedents of these constructs (Soto-Simeone et al., 2021). They further argue that gambling is an incompatible analogy for entrepreneurship, ignoring the psychological processes underpinning new ventures' survival. They suggest that scholars should be cautious about adopting a view of venturing as a 'game of chance' - which may discourage individuals from pursuing entrepreneurship. We hope this will be the first of many lively debates facilitated by this new feature.

#### *Literature Review Methods Papers – enhancing rigour*

To help expand conversations into the ways in which literature reviews are completed, *IJMR* has introduced its new section focusing on methods used to write literature reviews, and has appointed Associate Editor, David Fan to lead in this area. Despite a growing number of journals publishing review articles, methodological advice on how to actually conduct a literature review, and especially a review which leads to the development of theory, is limited (Breslin and Bailey, 2020; Kunisch *et al.* 2018). As noted above, *IJMR* has deliberately remained agnostic with regards the approach taken in completing literature reviews, in contrast to the approaches taken in other journals. For example, many journals now give primacy to systematic literature reviews and *AMA* stress the importance of the integrative review. We see a place for all types of reviews in theory development, including an important role to be played by the narrative review. Whilst most of the reviews published in *IJMR* have historically adopted this narrative approach (Breslin *et al.* 2020), the systematic literature review has been increasingly prevalent over the past decade (Hiebl, 2021). The most important criterion for publication in *IJMR* is that the chosen approach needs to be robust and analytical, and enable the authors to develop a sound theoretical or conceptual contribution. Achieving the latter goal can be challenging for some review methods, with many bibliometric papers, for example,

tending to be overly descriptive in their analysis (Breslin and Bailey, 2020). As a result, both bibliometric and meta-analyses remain underrepresented in *IJMR*.

Earlier this year we published the first of the review methods papers, in which Rojon et al. (2021) take stock of developments in systematic literature review methodology, highlighting potential areas for improvement and best practice. They show variability in the focus of review scholars, with more attention paid to explaining review protocol and search strategies used, as opposed to details on how the literature was analysed and synthesised (Rojon et al., 2021). They conclude with a guide for ‘best practice’ and an agenda for future refinement. We see the new section on review methods as supporting a robust and expanding literature offering clear and rigorous guidance to those seeking to develop review papers across a range of management disciplines.

#### *Theory-Driven Literature Reviews*

Our core focus as a journal is to advance theory through literature reviews, and a number of important contributions have recently added to our understanding of this process (Hoon and Baluch, 2019; Post et al., 2020). Focusing on the integrative review, Elsbach and van Knippenberg (2018) argue that conceptual value is added through new theoretical insights by integrating and/or critically assessing a body of knowledge. Alvesson and Sandberg (2020) challenge this view, instead arguing that reviews are a means to open up a field, challenge existing understandings and start new conversations as opposed to continuing existing ones. Hoon and Baluch (2019) argue that theorizing through reviews can occur via consolidative interrogation (consensus-confirming) and disruptive interrogation (consensus-challenging). Whereas the former focuses on similarities within a domain to clarify key constructs and relationships, the latter takes different points of view, opposing assumptions and conflicting stances to develop theory (Hoon and Baluch, 2019). Post et al. (2020) identify a number of ways in which literature reviews can advance theory by exposing emerging perspectives,

analyzing assumptions, clarifying constructs, establishing boundary conditions, testing new theory, theorizing with systems theory and theorizing with mechanisms.

On the other hand, the former *IJMR* Co-Editor team, Breslin and Gatrell (2020), present a number of theory development strategies which they categorize as miner or prospector approaches. Whilst miner reviews tend to outline and synthesize a given field, prospectors draw on evidence across domains with a view to changing conceptual understandings, and perhaps shifting research paradigms (Breslin and Gatrell, 2020). At *IJMR*, we have seen authors adopt a wide range of miner and prospector approaches, however there has been a notable shift over the years towards the prospector end of the continuum. As current editors, we believe *IJMR* has a strong contribution to make in this emerging field, given the wide variety of approaches our authors have taken to developing theory through literature reviews.

As papers increasingly prospect for theoretical novelty (Breslin and Gatrell, 2020), the distinction between review and theory papers can become blurred, as theory papers are frequently also developed from a review of the literature (Kilduff, 2006). Some draw boundaries between theory and review papers in terms of the latter's review methodology or *systematicity* (Callahan, 2010; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020; Rowe, 2014; Tranfield et al., 2002). Thus, if a paper develops a new conceptual framework, say, and is highly systematic in reviewing the literature it should be seen as a literature review (Rowe, 2014). Systematicity is defined in different ways. Breslin and Gatrell (2020) argue that reviews should be transparent, inclusive and critical. In other words, review papers provide a clear outline of the review method (Breslin and Gatrell, 2020; Callahan, 2014). Others differentiate between theory and review articles in terms of the *balance* between the review of literature on the one hand, and new theoretical insights on the other (Callahan, 2010; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2018). Elsbach and van Knippenberg (2018) argue that when the emphasis is on the evidence provided by the review, then it is a literature review, as opposed to a theory paper. Callahan

(2010) goes further and argues that theory papers do not attempt to comprehensively review a body of literature or indicate that their findings have emerged from this review. Instead in theory papers, authors selectively choose key bits of the literature that support their arguments (Callahan, 2010).

In many ways, the format of the theory paper has been shaped by the house style of certain journals. At the *Academy of Management Review*, for example, theory papers typically propose a specific conceptual model, build a case in support of this framework and pose a series of propositions that are derived from the model (Cropanzano, 2009). These papers will include a very clear literature review from which new arguments are made, and new propositions developed. Conceptual papers are necessarily targeted at a specific area, and those authors channel literature that is relevant to, and often supportive of, their new conceptual model (Cropanzano, 2009). This can result in other relevant literature being omitted or neglected. Elsbach and van Knippenberg (2020) also make the distinction between review and theory papers in terms of the comprehensiveness of the former. Conceptual and theory papers, they argue, draw on a narrow range of literature ‘relevant to understanding a specific phenomenon in a relatively narrow context’, or ‘a specific, theoretical perspective’ respectively (Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020: 1280).

Our thoughts on the differences between review and theory papers reflect many of these points. In addition, we note that these types of paper differ with regards to their direction of travel. Whilst literature review articles vary in the extent to which they develop theory, this process is grounded in a review of the literature. In other words, the starting point is the literature, no matter how extensive the review of that literature is. Theory papers on the other hand start with an idea, which is developed through the paper to produce propositions, models or new perspectives on a phenomenon. Here the literature is marshalled in support of that argumentation, not necessarily as the founding launch pad for those ideas. It is a unique feature

of *IJMR* that we span the gap between these different approaches, and reflect a fundamental synthesis around the development of theory from literature reviews. Our new section for debate essays, offers an additional layer of engagement with the process of developing theory in this way.

## **Conclusions**

As we look forward to what we are sure will be a revisiting of the Roaring Twenties, we reflect on what these challenges mean for *IJMR*. We do not underestimate the tasks that await us, but nor do we underestimate the strengths that we carry forward in meeting them. As F. Scott Fitzgerald remarked a century ago, ‘...so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past...’ (The Great Gatsby, 1925: 162).

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