

I started out considering how to remedy the abuse of null hypothesis significance testing in the Academy of Management Journal. The AMJ is dedicated to empirical research, so the application and misapplication of statistical methodologies are common issues.

For example, McWilliams and Siegel (1997) explored the misuse in management articles of the "event study" methodology, a technique imported from finance scholarship. They were able to explain the apparently contradictory findings from a number of previous papers as simply the result of the flawed application of the event study methodology.

NHST is somewhat unusual in that controversy over its application pops up in a wide variety of areas of research, over many decades (*c.f.*, Meehl (1967), Meehl (1990), Cortina & Dunlap (1997)). Recently it has appeared in AMJ, most obviously in Coombs (2010) article, "Big Samples and Small Effects: Let's Not Trade Relevance and Rigor for Power."

At first, I saw in the Coombs article simply a repetition of the remedy proposed elsewhere for issues with NHST: the reporting of effect sizes. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association reportedly includes "it is almost always necessary to include some measure of effect size in the Results Section" (Ellis, 2010).

But then I looked again at what Coombs had written:

As management scholars, can we really suggest that managers should change their decision calculus on the basis of knowledge that some new variable explains 0.0025 percent of the variance in organizational performance?

In this example, effect sizes are expressed in terms of practical application. Coombs explains the issue of relevance of management research in respect to the practitioners of management.

Here is the real issue. The "academic-practice gap" (Rynes, 2007) is the root cause of the abuse of NHST in AMJ. It is also not a new problem. Almost twenty years ago, then-president of the Academy of Management, Donald C. Hambrick (1994) gave an address that was published under the title, "What if the Academy Actually Mattered?" He discussed a number of areas in which he thought the AOM could improve, and many of those involved practical application. He believed that the AOM had a "responsibility to the institutions around the world that are in dire need of improved management," and to people who wanted to "be the most effective managers" they could. He proposed increased links between management research, education, and practice. He aspired to the AOM having influence on the practice of management "second only to the Harvard Business Review".

This aspiration to be relevant to practitioners is included in the mission statement of AMJ: "...to publish empirical research that tests, extends, or builds management theory and contributes to management practice." (AMJ, 2013)

Why has the academic-practice gap continued for so long? To answer that, first consider the organization that is the AMJ.

Like all peer-reviewed academic journals, it is a widely dispersed organization, with indistinct borders and a constantly changing membership. While the production office may comprise a distinct,

centralized group, the main determiners of the content of the AMJ are the authors and reviewers, who are researchers scattered through academic institutions around the world.

That dispersed organization has a culture. As explained in the textbook (Eisenberg 2010, p.111):

Organizational culture is the result of the cumulative learning of a group of people.... Culture is defined by six formal properties: (1) shared basic assumptions that are (2) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it (3) learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration in ways that (4) have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, (5) can be taught to new members of the group as the (6) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

In the case of AMJ, the culture is built around the collective understanding of not only the field of study, but also of what constitutes a publishable article. When researchers do a peer-review of an article that has been submitted to AMJ, they are judging the article not just against the explicitly stated criteria of AMJ, but also against the cultural criteria for articles in AMJ. Those cultural criteria have been developed over the years, and are evidenced not only by what articles appear in AMJ, but also by what articles have been rejected.

Socialization into AMJ culture is typically anticipated during graduate education, both through training in methods of research, and in training in how to write academic articles. There is also passive anticipatory socialization happening as potential members read articles that have been published.

According to the textbook, "The experience of organizational assimilation involves both surprise and sense making.... As new employee's initial expectations are violated, they attempt to make sense of their job and the organization" (Eisenberg 2010, p.124). As new members have their papers rejected by AMJ, they learned in detail what the cultural criteria for publication are, and how they are applied.

Once an author has learned the criteria well enough to be published, he or she can become a peer-reviewer: an enforcer of those criteria. Peer-reviewed academic journals are built on concertive control, where the authors of articles decide which articles get published. And as explained in the textbook, "concertive control systems can become even more stringent and less forgiving than their traditional, bureaucratic predecessors." (Eisenberg 2010, p.149)

There are explicit criteria established by the journal's bureaucracy, but they are largely interpreted and applied by the reviewers. Papers are really judged by implicit cultural criteria, that are more strict than the explicit ones. This is why, for example, the structure of articles in AMJ is so uniform, despite there being no explicit criteria concerning it.

As Hambrick (1994) explained:

Each August, we come to talk with each other; during the rest of the year we read each others' papers in our journals and write our own papers so that we may, in turn, have an audience the following August: an incestuous, closed loop.

Practitioners are outside the organization, and even when they are the explicit focus of it, they still aren't part of it. In reference to one of the articles on the academic-practice gap in the October 2007 issue of AMJ, Cohen (2007) pointed out that, "they never actually talked to or included practitioners in their discussions."

Indeed, practitioners and researchers of management are more separated than in other social sciences; in management there are distinctly separate tracks for the graduate education of researchers and practitioners. Authors of AMJ articles have PhDs, not MBAs.

The "Editor's Afterward" of the academic-practice gap issue of AMJ collects and presents the proposed solutions to the gap (Rynes, 2007). Twenty-six are presented in Table 1. There are proposals that "target" practitioners; ones that intend to better educate practitioners; ones that aim to create articles that are more appealing to practitioners; but only four of the proposals involve *working with* practitioners. And of those, only two propose that practitioners be given any sort of power in the research and publication process.

All four of those practitioner-inclusive proposals come from Debra Cohen. In her article in that issue (Cohen, 2007), she makes ten suggestions for closing the gap. The list starts with: "Practitioner reviewers should be included as reviewers for all blind-peer-reviewed submissions to academic journals such as AMR and AMJ and the like."

It's such a simple solution. If you want to increase the relevance of articles to practitioners, include practitioners in the process of deciding what articles get published.

Of course, just because it's simple doesn't mean it's obvious. Including practitioners in the review process completely disrupts the culture of the AMJ and the concertive control at work within it.

But it's difficult to see how the AMJ "might actually matter" without it.

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Word count: 1548

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