FROM THE AOM EDITORS

FROM A PORTFOLIO OF JOURNALS TO A SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Papers prepared for journals are fundamental vehicles in the production and dissemination of valuable scientific knowledge, and there are many "From the Editor" (FTE) essays in Academy of Management (AOM) journals that provide guidance for improving scholarly papers and impact. Most of these essays are focused "within paper" (e.g., Dorobantu, Gruber, Ravasi & Wellman, 2024; George & Cronin, 2024; Suddaby, Schulze, Wood, Markman & Weber, 2023; Thatcher & Fisher, 2022), and some even "within scholar" (e.g., Miller, 2024; Rockmann, 2022). Far rarer are considerations of how different kinds of scholarly activities amplify impact *across* papers and scholars (e.g., Lindebaum & Wright, 2021). This is unfortunate, as an individualistic focus fails to leverage one of the greatest strengths of the AOM peer-reviewed portfolio: the distinct functions served by each of the seven journals (Rockmann et al., 2021). For science to have impact, researchers must generate new knowledge and synthesize it with what is already known. Educators must create frameworks, based on this knowledge, to teach students about principles of organizations and management. Practitioners benefit from learning to apply such principles in organizational contexts. These activities support each other, and the AOM journals—as a group—facilitate this knowledge production system (see Figure 1). Authors who recognize these linkages can communicate more effectively how their findings are useful and usable—and to whom. The perspective of a knowledge production system offers the potential to amplify impact, in terms of who reads, cites, and applies research. Perhaps more importantly, this system coordinates scholars' individual activities, enhancing the impact of the Academy itself.

Understanding the knowledge production system means understanding how the distinct functions of the seven AOM journals add specific types of value, as knowledge develops through the cycle via published papers. At a very general level, the generation and synthesis of scientifically supported knowledge provides the basis for education and guidance regarding application, and the application of such knowledge creates new puzzles for researchers that restart the cycle, as seen in Figure 1. This *value cycle* is a between-journal process (which is why this FTE appears in all of the AOM journals)—the outputs from one journal are often the inputs to another. It is also a *value chain*; in each quadrant of Figure 1, different types of activities build on work from previous quadrant(s) to meet the needs of different consumers of the research. What a reader needs from a paper depends on whether the goal is to produce more research, teach students, or train end users to apply findings to a specific problem. Single journal papers need not be all things for all users; rather, they may be tailored to readers' specific purposes or roles. Understanding this allows authors to more clearly establish how their work is credible, to whom it is useful, and what makes it usable, allowing readers (and reviewers) to understand why the paper's findings matter.

KNOWLEDGE CREATION AS A VALUE CYCLE

To determine a paper's contribution, it is common to think about the scholarly conversation being joined—what does the paper add to this conversation? (See Caza, Harley, Coraiola, Lindebaum, & Moser, 2024.) Let us, however, consider more broadly what is useful in a conversation. Interesting conversations may be initiated by discoveries ("Did you hear that Chris and Sam are getting divorced?") that surprised us by contradicting our expectations ("They seemed like such a solid couple!"). To participate in explaining what is happening, people must use relevant concepts ("Chris lost *trust* when Sam hid conversations with Harper, then Sam *withdrew* after feeling unfairly *judged* by Chris.") that connect to broader instances of the phenomenon ("I expect that a 'solid couple' should … "). The conversation can be further enriched by exploring points of view or further abstractions of the phenomenon (e.g., "human relationships"). Thus, useful contributions to a conversation can be made at different levels of abstraction, but the usefulness is amplified (in terms of understanding what is being discussed) when all these levels build on—and integrate with—each other.

At the same time, the usable conclusions to be drawn from a conversation depend on the listener's aims. Some may be interested simply in understanding

FIGURE 1
Knowledge Production (Generation, Synthesis) and Knowledge Dissemination
(Education, Application) in AOM Journals

how and why such events happen; these are people who are generating and synthesizing explanations for what they see, so what is usable helps them to parse the phenomenon. Others may want to improve their relationship-building skills; they seek to be educated about how relationships work, so what is usable consists of frameworks constructed from the explanations that can guide action in a broad array of relational situations. Still others may already be in a relationship situation very much like Chris and Sam; they may join the conversation in hopes of understanding what they should do right now, so what is usable consists of clear action implications that apply to their current specific context.

The point of this simplified example is that a research conversation does not exist at one level of abstraction or for one purpose. Usefulness and

usability improve as one thinks about how different people might engage in the conversation, considering different activities.

Generation

The lower-right quadrant of Figure 1 represents generation, which is where scientific investigations develop concepts and the relationships among them, to analyze, explain, and understand organizational phenomena. This may involve identifying new and emerging phenomena, explicating and clarifying the nature of managerial or organizational concepts, or imagining how such concepts are intertwined. In the context of the AOM portfolio, generation is the primary domain of three journals: *Academy of Management Discoveries* (AMD), *Academy of Management*

Journal (AMJ), and *Academy of Management Review* (AMR). It is useful to consider how these three journals can inform each other.[1]

AMD draws attention to important phenomena that are not well-explained by current theory; this can kick off the cycle of knowledge development. An AMD paper might report on the discovery of an entirely new way of organizing (e.g., Majchrzak, Griffith, Reetz & Alexy, 2018), a contradiction to widely accepted science (e.g., Behfar, Cronin & McCarthy, 2020), or negative and unintended consequences that emerge from putatively positive policy (e.g., Whiteman & Cooper, 2016). While such discoveries may be interesting on their own, what adds to their importance is not simply that they are new, but that they are unexpected and unexplainable, given the current knowledge base (e.g., what might appear in *Academy of Management Annals* or *Academy of Management Collections* [AMC]). Such discoveries also may lead us to reconsider what we teach or advocate to managers and policymakers (e.g., what might appear in *Academy of Management & Learning* [AMLE] or *Academy of Management Perspectives* [AMP]).

Of course, researchers need to understand the underlying drivers of discoveries published in AMD before radically altering their beliefs, pedagogy, or advocated practice. AMD papers thus create new lines of research and opportunities for theorizing and investigation; this is the realm of AMJ, whose mission is to test, extend, and build theory that contributes to management practice. AMJ papers develop scientific explanations for phenomena (discoveries) through rigorous analysis. It may be that many AMJ papers are needed to understand the nature of causal processes and boundary conditions, to reveal the underlying details of a discovery (Dencker, Gruber, Miller, Rouse & von Krogh, 2023). Papers in AMJ might also need to develop new concepts and theoretically driven relationships that characterize the discovery, along with innovative methods to assess them (Gruber & Bliese, 2024), creating building blocks for development in other AMJ papers.

As multiple papers published in AMJ provide empirical evidence—qualitative or quantitative—about how specific concepts influence each other

under various conditions, broader patterns can be identified. These patterns can be the basis for theorizing, which is the role of AMR in the generation process (Cronin, Stouten & van Knippenberg, 2021; Thatcher & Fisher 2022). AMR publishes theoretical insights that advance our understanding of management and organizations, and extends theory by developing testable, knowledge-based claims. A theoretical development published in AMR can offer provisional explanations for the how and why of discovered phenomena (e.g., from AMD), generating empirical questions that drive further verification, refinement, and extension of the theory (via papers in AMJ). This is consistent with Weick's (1989) assertion that theories emerge from disciplined imagination; findings in AMD and AMJ provide some of that discipline.

Figure 1 suggests a linear pathway through the generation phase. For example, the discovery (in AMD) that venting could be adaptive, depending on the listener's response (Behfar et al., 2020), is made more usable when empirical findings (in AMJ) demonstrate when that might be the case and how venting can help. Accumulated empirical findings about the utility of venting become more useful and usable when findings converge, potentially leading to the development of a coherent and parsimonious theory (in AMR) that bounds the utility of venting. There are other potential pathways within this quadrant, which may cycle. Using the venting example, the original discovery (in AMD) might spawn a provisional theory (in AMR) for how and why listeners improve the utility of venting, and the theory could be refined and tested in subsequent studies in AMJ. A key point is that different types of generative papers can be leveraged in a nonlinear manner—consistent with what Chatman and Flynn (2005) called "full cycle research."

Topics that are important to organizations are rarely reducible to a single phenomenon. For instance, even if we understood everything there was to know about the venting phenomenon, it is part of (and informs) many larger topics, including emotion regulation, communication, and problem solving. To understand these broader organizational issues, researchers need to know how the various building blocks can be combined and synthesized.

Synthesis

Synthesis (lower-left in Figure 1) is where scientific investigations utilize generated findings to build structures of knowledge that are more robust, in terms of evidentiary support or generality across contexts. The process of synthesis is akin to secondary-data

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[1] AMLE is a theory-driven journal that publishes theoretical as well as empirical studies. In so doing, it is also generative in terms of knowledge production like AMR, AMJ, and AMD. What is different is that AMLE is domain-specific (Lindebaum, 2024), whereas other AOM journals focus on general management.

research; the primary data are the paper findings from the generation phase. Like generation, synthesis is part of the production process. New kinds of knowledge structures can emerge from the same set of generated findings, depending on how the findings are assembled, just as bricks and mortar can be used to create many different types of structures. Synthesis is the primary domain of AMR, AMC, and *Annals.*

AMR bridges generation and synthesis. Unit theories (i.e., specific causal relationships among particular concepts; see Wagner & Berger, 1985) published in AMR generate empirical work; the unit theories should, themselves, fit together into larger structures of programmatic theory (frameworks used to understand a topic of inquiry; Cronin et al., 2021; Kessler, 2017). This represents synthesis, and is consistent with AMR's mission (advancing understanding of management and organizations via theoretical insights); in this scenario, advancement pertains to how existing unit theories align with each other, in contrast to the generation phase, where advancement mostly deals with how a unit theory aligns with data. Synthesis leverages generation, as the unit theories' validity and boundary conditions depend on the associated empirical findings (AMJ) and discoveries (AMD). Yet, synthesis of tested unit theories also adds value, when new possibilities and insights emerge from the theories' juxtapositions. Usability is also enhanced when synthesis organizes unit theories into larger "chunks" (Gobet et al., 2001), making the resultant knowledge easier to learn and recall.

While knowledge about a topic can be broadened via the synthesis of unit theories in AMR, it can be deepened by richly exploring the development of a unit theory (including findings or discoveries that prompted it). This happens in AMC, which offers readers the opportunity to learn, holistically and from an expert's point of view, how the conversation regarding a specific topic has developed. Authors of AMC essays curate papers published in other AOM journals to enhance insights into key topics in management research. The AMC synthesis process is not algorithmic aggregation; rather, it leverages the authors' perspectives on how a particular set of AOM-published papers (e.g., discoveries in AMD, empirically driven breakthroughs in theorizing in AMJ, revolutionary theories in AMR) can be connected, and what specific insights emerge from that synthesis. AMC's unique curation approach offers a distinctive outlook on important organizational topics, with the goal of spurring the imagination of researchers, by suggesting new avenues for theorization and empirical work, or perhaps even discovery.

The science pertaining to management and organizational research is "big tent," so there are often many points of view on a topic. This is where *Annals* comes into the picture. *Annals* seeks to integrate different perspectives to provide a holistic, but provocative, synthesis of the broad current state of knowledge on a topic (Cronin & George, 2023). As a review outlet, *Annals* seeks to integrate all that is published on a topic. Thus, an *Annals* paper could conceivably leverage several AMC pieces by integrating their different points of view. For *Annals* to fulfill its purpose—integrating what is known about a topic so that readers can understand what appears to be settled science, what needs resolution, and how to advance knowledge—papers must be able to synthesize the work that has been published across all applicable generation-oriented journals. The "integrative" aspect of an *Annals* review requires multiple points of view (e.g., AMC), multiple theories (e.g., AMR), hundreds of empirical studies (e.g., AMJ) and, hopefully, some discoveries (e.g., AMD).

To illustrate how the synthesis phase might add value to generated knowledge, consider the venting example. The emergence of a supported unit theory for what makes venting (dys)functional (e.g., in AMR) may, over time, generate empirical work, and more unit theories, pertaining to venting at work. Each unit theory may spawn lines of inquiry into venting as it relates to other important organizational issues (e.g., reframing, voice, emotional contagion); over time, the accumulated insights from such lines of inquiry can be reflected upon (e.g., in AMC) by researchers in different scholarly communities. If the lines of inquiry can be integrated, we might be able to understand how venting fits with other kinds of expressions that regulate emotions at work (e.g., in an *Annals* paper). The resultant coherent body of knowledge should allow scholars to see more clearly where research needs to be done, and identify shared understanding in which we, as a field, can have confidence when disseminating our knowledge in classrooms and our writing.

We do note that, as with generation, the synthesis phase includes multiple sub-cycles beyond the rather linear progression we have described. Articulating how a particular line of research (AMC) or a topic (*Annals*) should be redirected may spur new theories (AMR) regarding "how" or "why" questions. Some sub-cycles may even reach back into generation. Considering venting, the accumulated knowledge (e.g., an *Annals* review) had made it clear that venting was dysfunctional for the venter. Challenging this received knowledge was the basis for the discovery (in AMD) that venting might actually have a positive

effect, depending on the listener. Scholarship becomes more robust when generated findings support each other, and synthesis is where structures of support are developed. Such structures become useful and usable products themselves, as they help managers to imagine more holistic ways to think about the types of issues faced by organizations. In this way, the structures also provide the basis for education, which is the next phase of the knowledge production cycle.

Education

Education is where the scholar's task enlarges to encompass end users—including those who are not involved in developing our knowledge products, but who seek to consume them for personal edification and professional use. Thus, the stakeholders in the education quadrant (upper-left in Figure 1) are professionals engaged in teaching and administration in the context of business schools seeking to educate students (broadly construed). This presents a new type of expectation for scholars, as the challenges associated with creating knowledge are not the same as the challenges of teaching others how to leverage it. Further, many business students are, themselves, skilled professionals; for scholars to claim the authority to instruct them requires both credible knowledge and pedagogical skill. AOM journals that add particular value in this realm are *Annals* and AMLE.

Annals papers represent highly credible knowledge on particular topics. Ideas presented in *Annals* have been studied under a wide variety of conditions, contexts, and points of view—by many researchers—and the studies that form the "data" for *Annals* papers (appearing in, e.g., AMD, AMJ, AMR, and AMC) have been carefully scrutinized in the peer review process. Credibility is enhanced when different streams of investigation converge into a coherent explanatory framework that accounts for observed phenomena. This is the core of what *Annals* does: synthesizing findings across many types of investigation, leading to a clear picture of what understanding seems to be reliable or trustworthy with respect to a topic. The review section of *Annals* papers, therefore, represents a resource for what we should be teaching about a topic, clarifying what is, at least for the moment, "settled science"[2] (e.g., Davis, 2015).

The AOM is a *professional* organization and, as a profession, we have a set of formalized norms about

how to understand things in a precise manner. Our knowledge is codified using specialized language that connects observed phenomena to theoretical frameworks (Hillman, 2024). Students and other end users do not always have such a foundation, which means they easily can misuse concepts, even when those concepts should be quite useful.[3] This highlights the fact that teaching students how to use even the most fundamental knowledge is critical. Here, lessons from AMLE about the effective communication of evidence-based findings is particularly germane (Hughes & Davis, 2024). AMLE often asks its authors to translate supported claims from AMLE published studies into specific lessons that management educators can deliver to students and managers who want to use AOM-generated knowledge for their particular needs (see AOM, n.d.a).

AMLE also develops theoretically informed perspectives regarding effective pedagogy in business schools, adding value to knowledge that researchers have demonstrated to be useful for organizational problems by informing scholars about how to make the knowledge usable to students. AMLE's primary audience, therefore, consists of management educators and senior managers at business schools who seek to advance the processes of management learning and education from a "big picture social sciences perspective" (see Lindebaum, 2024). Beyond drawing on other journals to determine what lessons emerge from our knowledge base, AMLE also encourages critical consideration of what we teach—and what we *should* teach but do not. Journals in the generation and synthesis aspects of the value cycle create knowledge that is worth teaching; AMLE helps the field to understand how to do that.

The added value in the education quadrant occurs because authors emphasize the need to advance pedagogy. While AMLE is at the center of this mission, *Annals* papers also contribute when the review summarizes what is known about a topic in a way that enables educators to teach students about the most current approaches to understanding it. For example, if the issue of venting were part of an *Annals* paper on emotion-regulation strategies in the workplace, that paper should help students to think about the promises and pitfalls associated with emotion-regulation

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[2] While this will only be accurate until a discovery upends our assumptions, such principles represent the ideas that, presently, seem most reliable and trustworthy.

[3] Most concepts in management have a colloquial use (e.g., *interest*, or *issue* in negotiation), are easily misconstrued (e.g., *psychological safety*), or are nonintuitive (e.g., *liminal identity*). Simply defining them does not make them usable. Developing the skill to apply them requires practice with feedback.

practices. Of course, convincing students—especially experienced professionals—to believe and accept scientifically informed ideas that run counter to their intuition (e.g., that "catharsis" from venting negative emotion is not actually helpful) is a particular challenge in management education—one that can be addressed by pedagogical innovations.

Learning and education are not training; rather, business education provides students and managers with frameworks that help them navigate problematic situations and think through their strategic and tactical approaches to organizational situations. That said, when providing advice that can be applied immediately, the task for the scholar changes once again.

Application

In the application phase (upper-right quadrant of Figure 1), end users take the knowledge that has been generated, synthesized, or taught, and use it to solve specific issues in their organizations. Accomplishing this means packaging useful ideas in ways that make them immediately usable. Readers of journal papers that offer pragmatic advice must (a) comprehend the advice, (b) understand when the advice applies to a situation, and (c) know how to execute specific actions to implement the advice. All of this must be communicated asynchronously. Among the AOM journals, application is primarily the domain of AMP, but AMLE and other journals also may contribute.

While the scientific claims made in the production phases are generally aimed at other researchers, the mission of AMP is to frame the implications in a manner that makes clear the relevance of these findings for practicing managers and policymakers. Such findings make use of the value cycle, as they leverage knowledge from the earlier production phases. The rigor required for an AMP paper requires authors to "accurately, thoroughly, and objectively represent the current state of [a] literature, warts and all" (Barnett, 2024: 1). AMP papers thus extract a different kind of value out of the research-oriented claims of papers in AMD, AMJ, AMLE, AMR, AMC, and *Annals*.

As AMP is aimed at end users who may not be researchers,[4] readability is especially important. It is even more important if end users are expected to learn to use research-based implications without the feedback that they might be able to access with teacher guidance. The value of even the clearest

prose is enhanced when lessons from AMLE about how people learn are absorbed and reflected in AMP papers. This synergy is bidirectional, as AMP papers also can be used in the classroom to illustrate the application of principles to specific contexts.

The application phase also restarts the value cycle. End users who apply the knowledge generated by management scholars provide critical opportunities to interrogate that knowledge. When research-based prescriptions are not entirely effective in practice, scholars should be challenged to understand the source and nature of the failure. Perhaps the knowledge is sound, but we did not communicate it effectively to the correct audience. Perhaps there are flaws in the theoretical basis used to create the prescription. Such discrepancies serve to restart the cycle and further develop the field's knowledge. Thus, application completes the cycle that began with generation, but it is by no means the end of the knowledge production process. In the application of scientifically validated managerial knowledge, we learn where our theories fall short, where our education is insufficient, and where the application of practice leads us to unexpected outcomes.

SPECIALIZATION AND COORDINATION ACROSS JOURNALS AND SCHOLARS

In our field, we have a somewhat destructive conflict between those who see impact as managerial application (e.g., Bartunek & Rynes, 2010) and those who view impact in terms of numbers of publications or citations. Our value cycle illustrates that this is a false dichotomy. The nature of impact varies in different parts of the value cycle, and there is no optimal point; all quadrants are needed. Impact occurs when managers know how to apply scientific knowledge to improve how their organizations function. That impact is more likely to eventuate when educators are effective at teaching students how to conceptualize organizational problems, which means that helping teachers to educate contributes to impact. Having something to teach depends on having a body of demonstrably accurate knowledge that can account for the complexity and variety of forces that interact to create organizational phenomena. Building such knowledge from new findings, replicated findings, and syntheses of these findings is thus part of impact. The value cycle acts as an impact multiplier, and reminds us that publishing is not a zero-sum game. The value cycle model invites authors, reviewers, educators, and practitioners to see journals as means to the larger ends that the

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[4] It should be noted that this pertains to skill and experience with research, as opposed to some kind of general capability.

AOM and scholars pursue: expanding opportunities to explore and connect ideas, to inspire and enable a better world through our scholarship and teaching about management and organizations.[5]

When an idea moves through the value cycle, it continues to develop. As noted, discovering that venting might be helpful, despite decades of counter-evidence (AMD), can be the basis for empirical work to investigate why that might be (AMJ); these mechanisms might yield theories (AMR) that, together, yield a coherent view on the utility of venting (AMC). This could inform the broader concern of emotion expression at work (*Annals*), which, in conjunction with other programmatic theories related to emotion management (e.g., contagion, effects on decision-making), should drive what educators focus on in applicable courses. The way to infuse what we know about emotions into curricula (Bartunek & Ren, 2022), as well as how to teach these lessons (AMLE), are part of how we demonstrate the relevance and value of thinking about employee emotion regulation to students in the classroom. More focused prescriptions (AMP) drive how we accomplish this for managers and policy-makers. Applying new policies or practices to deal with emotion expression will undoubtably uncover new discoveries (AMD) that, again, start the cycle as we continue to refine our understanding of how organizations work.

CONCLUSION: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Any paper must be located within the context of a scholarly conversation,[6] so it is important to understand whether the work intends to change the conversation (e.g., make a discovery), advance it (e.g., add findings), redirect it (e.g., propose new theory), or summarize it (e.g., review what has been found). Regardless of which of these purposes is intended, there is value in also connecting with some of the other purposes (e.g., summarizing a conversation clarifies why some new information is a discovery, which can help to redirect the conversation). At the same time, parties to this conversation may have distinct needs—some may want to inform it (researchers), while others may want to be informed by it (students, practitioners, policymakers). Such

roles are fluid, as those being informed by a conversation are essential to helping the informers know what to discuss. A single paper is not the conversation; it is *part* of the conversation.

Authors should remember that one paper need not do all things for all readers. It is important, however, to clarify what function(s) each paper serves in the value cycle, how other types of papers can be leveraged, and what impact is intended. Clarity regarding function and audience allows authors to establish clarity regarding how and why their findings matter and for whom they have impact. In turn, readers will know how to use the findings, further improving their usefulness.

A core function of any science is the development of a corpus of valid and reliable knowledge. An applied science has the added demand that knowledge be usable outside of academia. When scholars understand the interdependence among individual papers *and* among the AOM's seven journals, then the work that they create should be more integrated, improving our field's contributions and maintaining the value and relevance of the AOM for the future.

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[5] See the AOM's mission and vision (AOM, n.d.b).

[6] We note that it is also possible to start entirely new conversations (e.g., Majchrzak et al, 2018), but these are likely to leverage existing conversations in some way, such that the new work eventually connects back to accumulated science.

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