Editorial: Passing on the torch of Operations Management Research
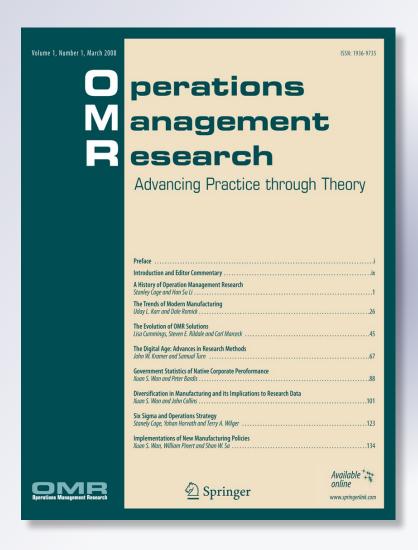
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Editorial: Passing on the torch of *Operations Management Research*

Patrick R. McMullen · Jack R. Meredith

In December of 2006, we signed a contract with Springer Publications to start an academic journal that was dedicated to Operations Management articles primarily concerned with the marriage of theoretical value and practical value. As we stated in our first Editorial (Meredith and McMullen 2008): "Since operations management is an *applied* discipline it is the aim of *OMR* to promote research that advances both the theory *and* practice of operations management. Hence, each regular paper published in *OMR* must make a clear contribution to the science *and* practice of operations management and include discussion of the potential of the research for advancing OM theory as well as its application." And also: We are looking for papers that nicely blend academic insight with clear potential for application in practice. However, some papers are probably too "high level" for OMR in the sense that it would be difficult for a manager to see how to apply their insights. … We particularly value straightforward studies of well-defined situations with clear, understandable factors being studied and analyzed. If the description of the study is difficult to understand, or it is hard to keep all the variables straight, or especially, if the eyes start to cross or close, this is a symptom that the paper may be too "high level."

The impetus for this project, however, had its roots many years before 2006. It was long felt that most Operations Management articles fell into one of two camps. One camp emphasized practitioner value, with a focus on implementation, but typically, the rigor associated with the development and practicality of the solution, is considered inappropriate for inclusion in an academic article. The other camp, which is more common than the first, essentially ignores practical issues associated with implementation altogether, and is totally focused on "theory." Such journal articles are rife with theory and proof, and any reader concerned with the implementation of the proffered "solution" is left "twisting in the wind." Moreover, in some journals, any discussion of the "dirty" aspects of implementation or practice are considered to be a distraction, potentially fatal, from the elegance of the paper's theoretical development.

This is when we decided that the field of Operations Management could benefit from a journal that sought to find a balance between practitioner and theorists. Thus, we started sharing the idea with some publishers, and Springer was the most interested. After signing the contract with Springer, we organized an Editorial Oversight Board to serve as a third-party to oversee the overall integrity of the journal. Then we started recruiting Area Editors for the journal, primarily drawing on individuals we either knew personally, or whose work we knew. Our intent was to pull together a talented and enthusiastic group of scholars who shared our belief in the importance of balancing theory and practice. We were successful in organizing a group of Area Editors in a reasonable amount of time. Of special importance to us was to recruit a set of Area Editors who represented the international community of Operations Management researchers, even though OMR was primarily an American journal in style and format.

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At this particular point, we then concerned ourselves with logistical issues—training the Area Editors on the use of the Editorial Manager software, deciding on some technical journal details (the physical layout of the journal, the number of issues per year, the number of articles in each issue), etc. Finally, in mid-2007, we were able to issue our first call for papers. This call took on various forms. First, the Area Editors were invited to submit papers. Second, a general call for papers was made in various publications via the Decision Sciences Institute, INFORMS, EurOMA, POMS, etc. Third, we informally advertised *Operations Management Research* via word of mouth and general networking through the aforementioned professional societies.

After the formal call for papers, we were quite nervous and all of those other feelings of unease that come when one embarks upon a new journey. Our unease took on many forms, but perhaps our two greatest fears were that: (1) very few papers would be submitted; and (2) the papers that were submitted would be rife with mathematical rigor (and were probably rejects from other theory journals).

The very first submission we received (Guide et al. 2008) relieved these feelings of unease to a very large degree. This paper was exactly what we envisioned the journal to contain: a paper that had tangible value to practitioners, but at the same time added theoretical value to the literature. After one revision, this paper was accepted for publication in *Operations Management Research*—our very first accepted paper! The upshot of receiving this paper was that we became convinced that others felt the same way as us: that is, the literature could and should benefit from Operations Management articles that are simultaneously concerned with both theory and practice.

But in the months following the initial receipt of papers, we still had periods of frustration where our two fears mentioned above were realized to some degree. That is, we (1) often were desperate for more submissions; and (2) many of the papers that were coming in were immediately rejected because they were predominantly theoretical and void of practitioner value. These "slow" periods, however, were offset by our efforts to pursue potential submissions by reaching out to authors of conference papers from POMS, EurOMA, DSI, INFORMS, and other organizations. Many of the papers that have appeared in *Operations Management Research* were the result of our efforts to convince authors that *Operations Management Research* would be a good (and quick) potential outlet for their work.

Our model for accepting papers is quite straightforward. If the paper displays potential for the marriage of practice and theory, we are interested. If the paper uses real data from real organizations, we are *especially* interested. As of this writing, 26% of all papers submitted have been ultimately accepted for publication in Operations Management Research. (Though the acceptance rate for the most recent year was 19%.)

In December of 2011, our term as co-editors-in-chief will end. As of this writing, a search is underway for new co-editors-in-chief. While it has been a lot of work, we have enjoyed launching this journal and have gotten great satisfaction from seeing the fruits of our labor in the form of *Operations Management Research*. We are also grateful to Springer and the support they have given us over the years in our attempts to marry OM theory and practice. And we are particularly grateful for the support from the Editorial Oversight Board and the Area Editors—without them, we would not be in the strong position we are in today.

That is not to say there isn't more work to be done. About a year ago, under the advice of our Editorial Oversight Board, we increased the page limit for initial submissions from the original 20 double-spaced pages to 25, to encourage more submissions. And our original promise of always responding to ALL submissions within 8 weeks (that is, not the average but the longest tail), which we faithfully observed (with a lot of cajoling) in the first year, we finally broke once in our second year—we are now less paranoid about this promise though we still try to maintain it. (Our average response time last year for non-desk rejected papers was 43 calendar days (6 weeks) but our longest response time was 99 days (14 weeks, ugh!).) Also, having adequately set the standards for the journal, we started accepting proposals for special issues and now have two in process, with the hopes of more in the future. Our contract with Springer has plenty of room for special issues, fortunately.

We sense that the biggest task for the next set of editors will be publicizing and promoting OMR even more broadly, further establishing its presence and relevance to scholarly research in operations management. To some extent, we feel that we launched OMR at an awkward time since we have heard from many authors that their Deans are now emphasizing publications in only the "premier" journals (that is, those on the Financial Times, etc. top-journal's list) and anything else won't be considered. Phooey on them! As we depart our co-editorship of this journal, we are certainly hopeful that the future of *Operations Management Research* will continue to emphasize the marriage of practice and theory.

References

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