



## Cottage industries, critique and scholarship

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We seem to be witnessing the birth of a cottage industry in our field as we, as a community of scholars, either reflect on our own publishing practices (e.g. Beatty and Leigh, 2010) or, more worryingly, permit others the licence to do so (e.g. Currie and Pandher, 2011, 2013) using methods that privilege technique over substance and method over an understanding of the complexities of the field in which we work. It is for us in management and organizational learning and education to decide collectively whether we permit this alarming trend to continue, gain momentum and become embedded and institutionalized within the growing panoply of academic performance management tools in a dean's armamentarium.

However, looking on the brighter side, one of the more productive outcomes of such inquiries is that they can cause us to stop, stand back and take stock of *what* we are seeking to achieve as editors, reviewers, authors and readers in the field of management and organizational learning and education, and equally importantly *where* we seek to place our significant conversations. The 'what' and the 'where' of our scholarship are instantiated in the aims and scope of the journals which populate our field. One of the difficulties that newcomers and outsiders face is that there may sometimes seem to be an embarrassment of riches for potential authors to choose from; witness the '84' referred to by Currie and Pandher (2013). A cursory reading of the above list reveals many highly specialized journals (e.g. *Journal of Applied Research for Business Instruction*), the majority of which are in fact so specialized as to be unfamiliar to us, indeed only 11 of them have citation-based rankings.

While an external perspective in general can have commendable attributes, one of the benefits of the expert-insider view is the privileged and sometimes tacit access that it grants to what really counts as important and what does not. In this regard, the majority of scholars working in the field of management and organization learning and education with whom we come into contact operate according to a number of fairly simple, reputable or tried-and-tested heuristics when confronted with choices about where they endeavour and aspire to place their work, for example, the Thomson Institute for Scientific Information's 2- and 5-year impact factors, UK's Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide, Australian Business Deans Council Journal Quality List 2013, the 'Financial Times 45' and, in our own field, Arbaugh's (2008: 8) 'big four' journals, that is, *Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE)*, *Decision Sciences Journal of*

*Innovative Education (DSJIE)*, *Journal of Management Education (JME)* and *Management Learning*.

In the light of the academic entrepreneurialism we are witnessing currently in the burgeoning journal rankings' industry, we feel that it is incumbent upon us at this juncture to give our voice to what we consider to be unique about the missions of those three of Arbaugh's 'big four' with which we are most familiar, that is, that we have either edited, served on the editorial boards of, reviewed for or had the privilege to have our own scholarship published in (and had our work rejected by on more than one occasion!): *AMLE*, *JME* and *Management Learning*. In doing so, we hope to provide some pointers for authors in their quest to find the most appropriate outlet for their work (given that one of the principal reasons for 'desk reject' at *Management Learning* is for 'lack of fit'); in particular, we aim to spell out what is unique about *Management Learning* scholarship.

*AMLE*'s declared interest is in 'approaches to individual learning and management education'; it seeks empirical manuscripts (within a philosophy of methodological pluralism), theoretical discourses and models and literature reviews. This overall mission manifests as four *AMLE* content areas: 'research and reviews', 'essays, dialogues and interviews', 'exemplary contributions' and 'resource reviews' (unlike *AMLE*, at *Management Learning*, we make no overt distinctions between different types of content, excepting book reviews). Within this broad remit, although *AMLE* seeks 'appraisals of approaches', it does not endeavour to be a teaching practice journal; rather, it is a 'scholarly journal that publishes rigorous logical and empirical analyses of courses, curricula, programs, and other practices within business schools'.<sup>1</sup>

Like *AMLE*, *Management Learning* is methodologically pluralistic; we publish empirical research (including quantitative analyses) and conceptual work (but not literature reviews per se). Like *AMLE*, we are not a teaching practice, or (contrary to some popular misconceptions which are hard to shake off) a teaching and learning journal. Where specific practices are reported and analysed in *Management Learning* (e.g. Tosey et al., 2013, is an empirical study motivated by critique of entrepreneurship learning and education), it is usually from the perspective of a fundamental *Management Learning* assumption that is reflected in the distinctiveness of our aims and scope, that is, that learning and knowledge are viewed as phenomena that are inherently processual, always provisional and frequently contestable. Moreover, unlike *AMLE*, our declared interest is in research that advances knowledge of managing, organizing, and education; hence, *Management Learning* connects more strongly than do *AMLE* and *JME* with organization studies and organization theory (see below).

In contrast to *Management Learning*, *JME* declares itself explicitly to be a voice for the scholarship of 'teaching and learning (SoTL) in management'. *JME* seeks contributions from management educators that reflect on professional practice in terms of what and how to teach in order that student learning in management and organizational disciplines may be enhanced. Like *AMLE*, but unlike *Management Learning*, *JME* pre-specifies various types of content (i.e. exercises, activities and simulations; conceptual contributions; reflections of teaching; empirical studies; scholarly reviews; and an 'Editors' Corner'). In common with *AMLE*, but unlike *Management Learning*, *JME* does not concern itself with organizational learning and knowledge – potential *JME* authors are encouraged to question and challenge current assumptions and practices, but this does not appear to be a core *JME* requirement.

With our colleagues' indulgence, we take the liberty of considering *AMLE* and *JME* to be 'cousins' of *Management Learning* on the learning side of the family (how close or far removed is a different discussion); however, an important strand of *Management Learning*'s intellectual DNA also overlaps with other close relatives on the organization side of the family, including *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Human Relations* and *Journal of Management Inquiry* (see

Parker and Thomas, 2011). It is with this latter group that we share a further attribute which serves to distinguish *Management Learning*: engagement in critique.

But what does this mean? What does critique in a *Management Learning* article look like? First, it means questioning what is often taken for granted in the field of managing, organizing, learning and education, with the aim of offering an alternative perspective on the topic under study. To employ a well-worn phrase, it is about ‘what is said’ and more importantly ‘what is not said’ on the topic. And while a critique of current literature may be a start point to developing an alternative perspective, it is not always so. An article may begin by proposing a new way of thinking about an issue or topic, and focus on developing and illustrating what such an alternative looks like or may look like. Either way, even though an article may be about practice, it is theoretically informed – and even if the focus of an article lies in offering a different theoretical understanding, there is some assessment about its relevance to education, learning and/or practice. *Management Learning* articles may also involve a reflexive questioning of our/the author’s own assumptions and practices as scholars – opening our own practices to scrutiny.

A key characteristic of this way of writing is rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973) combined with a deep understanding of the theoretical and meta-theoretical underpinning and positioning of the work. In other words, *Management Learning* articles are not about conclusions drawn from data abstracted from the complexity of the field that claim legitimacy based purely on methodological rigour, that is, thin description. Rather, they grapple with the complexity, recognize the uncertainty and offer creative, thought-provoking insights, ideas and possibilities that may resonate with scholars in our field. They are *thought-ful* scholarly articles that do not succumb to the trend where a focus on method outranks meaningful content.

Finally, in closing this Editorial, we would like to thank our authors and reviewers who consistently and dedicatedly maintain this philosophy and who are committed to sustaining the high quality of scholarship associated with *Management Learning*. Without you, we would be just another journal. Thank you.

## Note

1. <http://aom.org/Publications/AMLE/AMLE-Content-Areas.aspx>

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