

EDITOR'S COMMENTS: THEORY CONTRIBUTIONS AND THE AMR REVIEW PROCESS

Thomas Kuhn's (1962) influential analysis of the evolution of scientific disciplines distinguishes between "normal science"—designed to examine the empirical implications of received theoretical paradigms—and "revolutionary science"—designed to develop and test new theoretical paradigms. While originally developed to describe the evolution of science, the distinction between normal and revolutionary science can also be applied to the evolution of purely theoretical contributions to a research discipline, including the field of management theory.

On the one hand, some theoretical work in this field is designed to extend received theory in new and creative directions—what Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) call "gap spotting theory." This work takes its assumptions and basic logic from prior theory and explores how these can be applied in new ways, to new phenomena, and to new questions. While this work can be described as normal science in that it takes the received view as largely given, this does not imply that it is uninteresting, uncreative, or unimportant. Indeed, Kuhn (1962) would argue that most science is of this normal variety and is extremely important to the evolution of a field of work.

On the other hand, other work in management theory is designed to develop new theory that explicitly rejects the assumptions and logic of prior work and replaces these with different assumptions and a new logic—what Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) call "problematization theory." This new theory may address old questions in new ways. More fundamentally, it often identifies new questions and explains why they are important. Kuhn would probably describe this kind of theory work as revolutionary science. While it is relatively rare—compared to normal science—it, too, can have an important impact on the evolution of a field.¹

¹ Mahoney and Qian (2013) have discussed how the "problematization" process has unfolded, and is continuing to unfold, in the field of strategic management. A survey reported in Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland (2006) identified seventeen articles that were nominated as "interesting" by two or more *AMJ* editorial board members in a survey conducted in the fall of 2004. These seventeen articles may be examples of revolutionary science.

AMR's mission statement suggests that—to the extent that papers are accessible to a broad scholarly management audience—the journal seeks to publish both kinds of papers. We are interested in papers that significantly extend received theory in new and creative ways and in papers that create altogether new theory and apply that theory to understand previously underexamined questions.

However, the mission to publish both normal and revolutionary theory papers creates a challenge for the *AMR* editorial process. In particular, the best examples of each of these kinds of papers will typically be very different from one another and, thus, difficult to edit within a single process.

For example, whereas in normal science theory papers scholars adopt their major assumptions from prior theory, in revolutionary science theory papers scholars reject those assumptions. Whereas in normal science papers scholars adopt the logical structure of prior theory, in revolutionary science papers scholars look to replace that logic. And whereas in normal science papers scholars attempt to thoroughly explore the theoretical and empirical implications of applying received theory in new ways, in revolutionary science papers scholars often ask more questions than they answer, and they ask new questions that have been largely ignored.

If reviewers are expecting to read a revolutionary science paper and, instead, read a normal science paper, they will often be disappointed—even if the normal science paper in question is of very high quality. And if reviewers are expecting to read a normal science paper and, instead, read a revolutionary science paper, they can sometimes be confused and even enraged—even if the revolutionary science paper in question is of very high quality. In both cases reviewers could end up recommending the rejection of what is, in fact, a high-quality paper.

How then does one organize an editorial review process that maintains the highest standards for publication, seeks to speak to a broad scholarly management theory audience, and yet is open to publishing both of these very different kinds of papers? Answering this question has, over the years, led to some changes in *AMR*'s review process.