

■ SHAWNEE VICKERY, Feature Editor, Eli Broad Graduate School of Management, Michigan State University

## Writing the Ideal Paper for *JOM*: A New Editor's Perspective

by Robert Handfield, College of Management, North Carolina State University

As I assume the role of the new editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Operations Management*, I look forward to continuing the standards of excellence set by the previous editors of the journal. I also believe it is worthwhile to reflect on where the field of Operations Management (OM) has come from, where we are today, and the challenges that lie ahead of us as a discipline. We find ourselves as a field in an interesting predicament: OM is faced with some of the most interesting research questions in global business, yet we have the least developed empirical knowledge base of any of the academic business disciplines. This represents a challenge, but also a significant opportunity. In this brief article, I will share my particular views on relevant research are, and what I hope to promote for *JOM* over the next five years as the editor-in-chief.

The editor of *JOM* for the last five years, Jack Meredith, has encouraged the publication of empirical research that contributes to theory development in the field of operations management. I am likewise predisposed to supporting research that is exclusively in this vein, with the stipulation that manuscripts accepted for publication meet the following criteria: (1) Cross-functional and cross-enterprise decision-making, (2) Research rigor applied through the scientific theory-building approach, and (3) Managerial relevance.

### Cross-functional and Cross-enterprise Decision-making

Too often, operations managers fail to realize that they cannot "do it alone," and do not consider the implications of their decisions on other functions, suppliers, customers, and community at large. In my mind, business practices of the future will be defined in a new unit of analysis: the supply chain—not the individual organization. As

a result of environmental shocks and global competition, organizations now find that it is no longer enough to manage their internal processes. They must also be involved in the management of the network of all upstream firms that provide inputs (directly or indirectly), as well as the network of downstream firms responsible for logistics, delivery and after-market service for the product/service to the end customer. From this realization emerged the concept of the "supply chain." The supply chain encompasses all activities associated with the flow and transformation of goods from the raw materials stage (extraction), through to the end user, the associated information flows, and the capture, recycling, and/or minimization of material waste. Material and information flows go both up and down the supply chain. Supply chain management is the integration of these activities through improved supply chain relationships, to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Although much of the prior work in OM has emphasized the improvement of activities within the four walls of an organization's manufacturing/service facility, the emphasis is now changing to reflect an optimization of entire supply chain operations. Organizations will have preferred suppliers and customers worldwide, and will need to effectively manage these relationships to create value and compete. Electronic commerce technologies will play a critical role in effectively integrating these supply chains by enabling information and forecasting visibility across engaged participants.

### Methodological Rigor and the Scientific Method

A second important theme in my editorial policy is a willingness to explore nontraditional research methods to explore relevant



#### Robert Handfield

is the Bank of America Distinguished University Professor of Supply Chain Management in the College of Management at North Carolina State University. He is the founder and director of the Supply Chain Resource Consortium at NC State (<http://scrc.ncsu.edu>).

Handfield is recognized for his expertise in supply chain management, new product development, and B2B E-commerce.

[robert\\_handfield@ncsu.edu](mailto:robert_handfield@ncsu.edu)

research questions, so long as they adhere to proven scientific methods of investigation. The field of OM has been characterized by a dominant positivist epistemology over the last fifty years. While other business fields such as marketing, organizational behavior, and finance have matured through the process of the scientific theory-building process, OM has been slow to shrug off its methodological roots in operations research. A large number of journals publish OR-based research exclusively; however, relatively few publish OM empirical articles exclusively. As such, my editorial policy is to publish research that is based on solid empirical methodologies based on the scientific method. I will also select a group of well-trained associate editors experienced in scientific methods of empirical research. The process for reviewing and accepting manuscripts will also be modified somewhat, to ensure that papers that are not methodologically rigorous are caught earlier in the review process, as opposed to later.

It should be noted that empirical research in OM spans a broad diversity of methods, including qualitative approaches (structured and unstructured interviews, coding and matrix analysis), meta-analysis, critical event techniques, simulation, quasi-experiments, lab studies, and data collection using the World Wide Web. In each case, the nature of the problem should drive the research method chosen. I believe that a diversity of research approaches is not only appropriate, but absolutely necessary for a journal such as *JOM* to contribute to the academic field. The research question and the underlying body of theory in the area should drive the research approach.

Many empirical methods are dismissed as "soft" by some OM researchers in that they do not fall into the traditional rubric of operations research and quantitative methods. In some respects, based on some of the less rigorous work published up to now, I might have to agree. However, my position is that a solid set of precedents exists for empirical methods that must be utilized to drive methodological rigor into OM empirical research. If there is any weakness to the recent set of OM empirical research publications, it is that they suffer from poor research and sampling designs, or worse yet, poor underlying theory de-

velopment. The first problem has been identified by a number of researchers but remains a consistent problem in the field. One of my editorial goals will be to "raise the bar" on methodological rigor for publications in *JOM*. The second problem, lack of poor theory development, is due in my opinion to the inexperience of the first generation of OM empirical researchers. While early attempts focused more on descriptive approaches to OM, the next generation of published research must build a solid theoretical foundation for hypothesis creation, testing, and validation.

### Managerial Relevance

The third important theme in my editorial outlook is to only publish articles that are *managerially relevant*. That is, I have always believed in conducting research that contributes to our field as a scientific discipline and to apply this knowledge to the practice of management as a profession. To achieve this goal, many OM researchers are now forcing themselves to develop an intimate understanding of the problems facing OM practitioners. The nature of these problems has been changing over time. Some 10 to 15 years ago, practitioners wanted specific solutions to constrained, well-defined problems bounded by any assumptions. They wanted to know how much inventory to order so that they could reduce the associated costs. They wanted to know how to schedule jobs through either an assembly line or a job shop so that they (the managers) could improve on-time delivery or reduce the average flow time of jobs. They wanted to know how to generate effective and efficient production plans or where to best locate their plants. In short, they wanted procedures that generated numerical answers to specific numerically based problems that could be solved through linear optimization models with appropriate constraints. These problems still exist. However, they have in many cases become overshadowed by a different set of problems.

The problems facing operations managers today are often less well defined. Managers are now more interested in understanding what factors, for example, affect the successful deployment of new technologies involving coordination between multiple organizations, or how to measure and manage strategic alliances

with these parties. They are seeking how to deploy global manufacturing facilities, and create multi-echelon distribution systems that support B2B e-commerce initiatives. Managers are faced with having to develop methods of meeting ever-increasing demands for better customer service and higher fill rates, yet are also pressured to keep less inventory on-hand and manage a proliferation and growing number of SKUs. They are being asked to do more with less: fewer resources, lower capital investment budgets, and fewer people to manage these resources. To aid managers in solving these dilemmas, I believe that OM researchers must turn to *theory-driven empirical research*. This emphasis on theory is critical if Operations Management is to continue evolving into a field of scientific investigation. Researchers often discuss the fact that Operations Management is a field that is action oriented but lacks a unifying theory. The researcher would be very pressed to identify a true "theory" in Operations Management. Often, this lack of theories has forced researchers in our field to "borrow" theories from other fields such as Organizational Behavior, Marketing and Strategy. Relevant bodies of theory that may be relevant to OM research may include areas such as agency theory, the resource-based view of the firm, resource dependency, transaction cost analysis, network theory, and others. By focusing on theory, more specifically "good" theory, I believe OM researchers can confront many of the problems faced by managers and help them to solve their problems, thus rediscovering the dictum of Lewin (1945) and re-iterated by Van de Ven (1989) that "nothing is so practical as a good theory."

### References

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