

Book & Resource Reviews

Opening the Black Box of Editorship, by Yehuda Baruch, Alison M. Konrad, Herman Aguinis, and William Starbuck. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 296 pages, hard cover.

Reviewed by Bente Elkjær, Graduate School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

"Editing is above all an imperfect activity that incorporates human weaknesses and errors and has no optimal solutions. However, editors can do more and feel better about their effects if they make realistic assessments of their personal capabilities and situations" (p. 268). This is how the editors conclude the Epilog to their collection of papers on the *Black Box of Editorship*. The book, which is the first collection on editorship, covers a wide range of very interesting topics, and I could not help being reminded of the title of Woody Allen's movie: *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (but were afraid to ask; 1972)* because everything that has to do with editing, reviewing, and writing in journals appears to be covered in this volume.

The editors of this volume are themselves extremely experienced in editing journals. Speaking as a reader and reviewer of the anthology, an author of scholarly papers and for the last 4 years, one of the two chief editors of *Management Learning*, my editorial work will never be the same after having read through these 25 pieces and almost 300 pages by a highly esteemed group of experienced journal editors. This book can be recommended for editors of (scholarly) journals as well as for reviewers, authors, and readers. Besides its distinguished content, the volume also has an excellent Author and Subject Index, comprehensive Notes on Contributors and a short Preface.

The book is divided into four sections: First the "General/Introductory Chapters" (by Konrad, Hollenbeck, Ryan, & Barley); a section on "Effective Editorship" (by Kacmar, Rynes, Feldman, DeNisi, & Shapiro and Bartunek, Kilduff, Hodgkinson, Bergh, Jacobs, & Bedeian); one on "Editing Different Types of Journals" (by Zedeck, Welbourne, Tsoukas, Clark, & Wright, Williams, and Forgues & Forray), and a final one on "Editorship and Academic Career" (by Baruch, Kulik, & Cascio, with the Editors' Epilog). There are many tips regarding such mat-

ters as communicating with authors (Rynes), and angles on the nature of editorship ranging from engaging in knowledge creation (Konrad, Hollenbeck) to editing as a service to the community (Ryan) via editing as mentoring (Barley, Baruch), and as a developmental activity (Bergh). There are ideas on different approaches to being an editor: One role that was particularly stressed by several contributors is that of the manager with a clear vision of what he or she wants of the journal and of their editorship (among others are Feldman, Barley, Hodgkinson).

Reviewing a collection of papers always poses more problems than reviewing a book with one consistent theme because of its richness and because some issues just catch you more than others. For my part, I was intrigued by the contributions that deal with writing decision letters (there are several, but Rynes and Bedeian address this issue explicitly in their chapters). They discuss how detailed decision letters should be and cases where the manuscript falls to the ownership of the editor rather than the author; also the delicate matters of addressing respectfully authors whom you have to assume have done their best (when it is not good enough), and politely telling authors that they have not bothered to look at the website of the journal, let alone read some of the papers already published on the subject.

Baruch points out that editors are also authors, and since we also receive decision letters from other editors during our time of editorship, we should strive to frame a decision letter that is not discouraging and hurtful. But I am sorry to admit that we do not always take the trouble; and I would like to add a few words about language and the traditions for phrasing critiques to account for why decision letters may be written in different ways by different editors. It is important to remember that not all editors have English as their mother tongue and also that they come from different academic traditions. The European continental tradition, deriving from German academia, for example, tends to use much more direct forms of expression than the more subtle ways of providing critique that one finds within the Anglo-American academic style, which I prefer: I have attended many tough academic debates that were not particularly fruitful for further thinking and learning. However, the Continental European style also runs in my

veins, and as English is not my mother tongue, it is very possible that my decision letters may have a different effect than intended. English is an extremely difficult language because it has an elaborate vocabulary of which I (and probably other editors) can only master a fraction. My language therefore tends to be more restricted, and possibly more harsh and direct because I was not brought up with the native English feel for meanings and associations. My own advice to myself is always to sleep on decision letters. Normally I follow this counsel, but sometimes when I am too stressed—things (including decision letters) just have to be sent out as they are—and immediately! I hereby beg all authors whom I have offended to accept my apology and understand that I am always trying to improve myself and my editorial conduct.

Having said this, I do think that as a scholarly community we need to question the limitations of the dominance of Anglo-American editors within organizational and management studies. This brings me to another issue in the book under current scrutiny that intrigued me: namely that of “embracing otherness” in being able to include different styles of reasoning and writing (Tsoukas). In the editorial team of *Management Learning* (the editors-in-chief, the associate editors and the reviews editor), we have spent many hours discussing how to embrace and cater to a variety of cultural posts on management and organizational learning. We have been aware of the need to include scholars positioned in different continents in our international editorial teams, as reviewers, associate editors, and as chief-editors. At meetings with our international editorial board we have discussed strategies for reaching out, and we have published (a few) papers from non-Western countries. Nevertheless, I think that Tsoukas has an important message when, quoting Maruyama on seeking a “polyocular vision” (173–174), he stresses “location within a particular intellectual tradition” rather than geography in its physical sense (land, continents, and countries). When we add publishing as communication, development and learning, this awareness of the limitations implied in speaking from within a particular academic tradition becomes extremely important. If we understand learning as a “response to what is other and different, to what challenges, irritates or even disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something we want to possess” (Biesta, 2006: 27), then the disturbance from the outside becomes pivotal. Again, just as writing decision letters is not an easy task within editor-

ship, editing with an eye to learning and development within a field is not an easy task either, because it challenges the understanding of self and community. However, if we wish for a global orientation the only way is to aim at (real) learning from other cultures rather than expecting other cultures to adapt to “us.”

I would like to finish this review by raising a matter that the book, despite its many merits, does not actually address, and that is the consequences of the changes for editorship when so many papers are found by way of the web. There are some really interesting papers about web-basing the whole process of editing (Kacmar; Kilduff) and on running a purely electronic journal (Forgues & Forray). I have found that having the whole editing process on the web has been a great help in the editing of *Management Learning*, and I would certainly not want to go back to e-mail handling of papers, let alone hard copy. However, I was surprised by the extent to which the editors of an electronic journal think that they need to imitate print-based journals by, for example, collecting papers in issues, and publishing these regularly in order to gain legitimacy (Forgues & Forray: 200). I cannot help wondering why publishing issues of journals at regular intervals should appear more legitimate than merely publishing papers when they are ready. This should be seen in the light of some information I received this year (2008) when participating in a seminar organized by Sage Publications for editors at the AOM, namely that 60% (sixty percent!) of all papers are found by way of Google (40% via Google, and 20% via Google Scholar). The new pattern of seeking knowledge will have a tremendous impact on how we view our role as editors now and in the future, because it is not so much journals that are sought as single papers. This means that awareness of (catchy) headlines and keywords will be of great importance, and the significance of the “gurus” within a field may also be diminished as Google searches may be for content rather than prestigious names.

Although I have concluded by pointing out what is missing in this book on “everything you always wanted to know about editing,” nobody should be discouraged from reading it—on the contrary. It can be highly recommended—go and read it!

REFERENCES

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Opening the Black Box of Editorship, by Yehuda Baruch, Alison M. Konrad, Herman Aguinis, and William Starbuck.

Reviewed by Jane Schmidt-Wilk, Maharishi University of Management.

The journal editor's job has long been shrouded in mystery, leading to many myths and misunderstandings about journal publishing. The purpose of this edited volume is to clarify the role of the editor and thus help create a more transparent system of publishing in the management and behavioral sciences. Based on my 3-year stint as editor of the *Journal of Management Education (JME)*, I was eager to read this book, which presents the voices and reflections of 29 scholars who have gained recognition in their roles as editors of management journals. I found valuable insights and good advice for current and aspiring authors, reviewers, and editors. In this review I summarize the contents of the book and offer some of my own reflections.

The 25 chapters of *Opening the Black Box of Editorship* are organized in 4 parts. Four introductory chapters address fundamental questions: "What is knowledge creation? What is knowledge development? What is the editor's role in each of these processes? How is editing a service? What are the primary roles that editors play?" The second part, consisting of 10 chapters, presents a range of contemporary perspectives on what it means to be an effective editor. The discussion begins by addressing operational factors in editing. Two chapters discuss establishing effective and efficient manuscript submission, review, and tracking processes, while three chapters explore issues related to interactions with authors, reviewers, and associate editors. One chapter explores strategic issues involved in creating the conditions for improving journal recognition and ranking in a global marketplace. Two chapters delve more deeply into the specific activities and roles of the editor in the craft of editing, including assessing manuscript contribution, and two chapters explicitly address issues of ethics and integrity in the editorial process.

Part 3 is a compilation of six chapters about editing specific types of journals: the top academic journal in its field, a bridge journal that serves both scholarly and practitioner audiences, a global journal, an independent journal, a new journal, and an electronic journal. Each chapter offers valuable insights that broaden the scope of the book. I personally found the chapter about devel-

oping a global journal most enlightening; it helped me escape from the North American paradigm that emphasizes *contribution to scholarship* as being of paramount importance to understand the European perspective, which considers *voicing one's thoughts* as primary.

Part 4 offers four chapters that explore the role of editorship within the academic career, whether as an editor, associate editor, or author. The chapter on selection of journal editors will be useful to many organizations that sponsor journals. Finally, the epilogue contrasts some of the central arguments presented in the book, neatly summarizing some of the main challenges involved in editing a management journal.

As I read the book, I found myself nodding in agreement with many of the specific points mentioned. For example, as editor of *JME*, I too have:

- Been told "You can do anything; you are the editor." While this statement may serve as a good confidence builder for a rookie editor, it is not an accurate description of the editor's role. Journal editing takes place within a scholarly community with established standards and norms about processes and outcomes, characterized by logic, fairness, and timeliness. Every editorial decision has its consequences, many of which are predictable, and only some of which are beneficial to all parties involved—the journal and its various constituents.
- Transferred my journal to a web-based system at the start of my tenure and marveled at the benefits in terms of ease, time-savings, and system accessibility and reliability.
- Learned that editing a journal requires balancing a combination of roles: judge, instructor, grammarian, supporter, organizer, cajoler, appreciator, and visionary—all the while managing a diverse group of stakeholders and mentoring manuscript evolution, in addition to maintaining one's own teaching career.
- Realized that editing a journal means constantly exercising one's decision-making skills, including whether to try and "cultivate a gem" or preserve precious reviewer resources, and constantly exercising one's interpersonal skills, including being able to reject a manuscript while building the confidence and self-respect of the author.
- Discovered that editing a journal means taking on the professional identity of the journal to a degree greater than I had ever anticipated.

Because the book speaks specifically to editing management journals, as I read, I wondered whether there is a difference between editing a management journal and editing a management education journal. Management journals exist to disseminate the scholarship of discovery, integration and/or application in the behavioral and organizational sciences, while management education

journals exist to disseminate the scholarship of teaching and learning in these fields.

From the above short and admittedly incomplete list, it would be easy to conclude that my experience editing a management education journal is very similar to editing a management journal. That does not surprise me. After all, I had attended sessions about editing at the Academy of Management annual meetings that were organized by this editorial team in the early days of my editorship, and I learned about my new job from many of these contributors, as well as from former *JME* editors.

I assumed from the outset that editing any scholarly journal requires a certain skill set, and so there would be important similarities in the processes of editing the two types of journals. On reflecting on my experiences, in particular on one experience that I did not find mentioned in the book, however, it seems that the *outcomes* of editing the two different types of journals may differ. More specifically, a number of chapter authors mentioned that they became less prolific in generating their own publications, at least during their editorships. Instead, they noted that the benefits of being a journal editor of a management journal in terms of publication productivity came after their terms of editorship had expired. My experience with publication productivity is similar, but I have found that because the focus of *JME* is on teaching and learning, my learning as an editor has benefited my teaching. I now research and write editorials and have little time for writing scholarly papers, to the consternation of my writing partners. But my teaching responsibilities continue alongside my professional commitments, and that's where I have noticed a benefit. Because I read so many manuscripts, I am exposed to many ideas about teaching and learning in management. I am frequently inspired to try the ideas out in my own courses. Thus, I have found that being the editor of a management education journal has enriched my teaching, a benefit of editing that I did not find discussed in the book.

Management journals aim to promote and disseminate management research, while management education journals, in particular *JME*, exist to improve management teaching and learning. Thus, the service role I am playing is fulfilling one of the primary purposes of the journal I edit—promoting the exchange and application of useful, tested, innovative ideas about teaching and learning in management.

My review would be incomplete if I did not mention two concerns. One regards the 10 chapters on effective editorship that constitute Part 2 of the book. Although these chapters provide a multifac-

eted view of the editor's role, I found it difficult to grasp the "big picture." I would have preferred to have these 10 chapters organized in two complementary sections, perhaps six chapters in a section on Operational and Strategic Issues, and four chapters in a section on the Craft and Ethics of Editing. These or similar section headings might have made the relationships among these chapters easier to comprehend. My other concern was the absence of any discussion about writing editorials, another editorial duty with its own demands and deadlines.

In conclusion, the contributors to this edited collection have produced a varied and valuable resource for scholars involved in the processes of knowledge creation and dissemination, as practiced today in the management and behavioral sciences. The chapters provide useful principles, insights, and advice generic enough to apply to a variety of manuscripts and journals. I can envision using some of the chapters with my doctoral students to help them explore the different ways they might frame their contributions for publication in North American management journals. For a profession that has largely been learned through mentoring or trial and error, this book will serve as a collective guide to current and prospective authors, reviewers and editors, whatever type of journal they are working with.

***Opening the Black Box of Editorship*, by Yehuda Baruch, Alison M. Konrad, Herman Aguinis, and William Starbuck.**

Reviewed by **Russ Vince**, University of Bath, UK.

This is not only a book about editorship in particular; it is a book about scholarship in general. While the role of editor is distinctive, the process that underpins this role and that connects it to an academic community can be seen as a guide to scholarly excellence. I can illustrate this point with a quotation from Carol Kulik (chapter 22) who says: "My editorial experiences should make me a better researcher, a better scholar, a better academic. And I believe that they have" (225). I associate with the quote because it connects to my own feelings about the role, and because it implies that improvements in our own practice as scholars can emerge when we engage with our peers in supporting and developing our own and each others' academic writing. I don't think that you need to be an editor to improve as a researcher, scholar, or academic—although reading this book shows that

the role clearly does help to focus the mind on how to write for journals as well as edit them.

There is much that is valuable within this book. I found this volume to be full of sensible advice, interesting experience, and practical wisdom. It also has an appealing and unexpected conclusion . . . but I will revisit this point later. I like this book because it communicates honestly and clearly the experience of individuals who have occupied the editors' role. Many of the chapters highlight summary conclusions both for editors and for authors. For aspiring editors it provides a wealth of information and advice about how to edit. For potential authors it supports the development of an appropriate approach to writing for journals, and particularly the importance of making explicit a paper's contribution to knowledge. A key message from the editors of this volume is that journal editors influence the shape of future knowledge, but also that they accomplish this through an "open-minded" partnership with authors. The chapters cover the role of editors and processes of editorship in knowledge creation and dissemination. There are four broad sections to the volume, which include four general and introductory chapters, ten chapters on effective editorship, six chapters on editing in the context of different types of journals, a final section of four chapters covering editorship and academic careers, and an epilogue on key tensions within the editor's role.

Part 1 emphasizes the role of editing in knowledge creation and development. Its contributing authors do an excellent job in conveying the complexity of the content of editors' work. For example, there are discussions of the subjectivity of editorial judgment, the need for extensive communication with authors and reviewers, and the power that editors have to make decisions and to influence a knowledge community. There is an exploration of the joys and difficulties of undertaking an editorial role, as well as different interpretations of what the role means and involves in practice. For example, the editor is characterized as an individual who juggles three conflicting roles—ambassador, mentor, manager—and that "journals succeed when editors play all three well" (39). We are also reminded that "all manuscripts contain a piece of the author's self" (41), and therefore, that all manuscripts deserve to receive our respect and support. In addition, there is much here for authors, including some very pragmatic suggestions, for example on the importance of getting the paper's introduction right, as well as "insights that every author should know" (53).

Part 2 of the volume on "effectiveness" is the most extensive in the book, covering the creation of

an effective manuscript review process; issues that arise from communicating with authors ("the range of human behaviours that one encounters as an editor is truly incredible" 65); building and maintaining a strong editorial board; managing the editorial review process; and the ethics of journal management. There are very specific chapters covering the use of technology to improve the editorial process and how to move a journal up the rankings. There are interpretive chapters within this section, for example, on an "activist editorial model," and on assessing and directing manuscript contribution as a "developmental editor," which emphasizes editors' pivotal role in managing the communication process between authors and reviewers.

Part 3 offers a range of chapters that focus on experiences of editing different types of journals. For example, the demands of editing a top academic journal; editing a "bridge" journal (where the journal serves overlapping but distinct audiences); and developing a global journal, with an emphasis on "embracing otherness" through scholarly globalism rather than parochialism. Three chapters within this section are all about the specific experiences of sustaining and developing an independent journal (the *Journal of Management Studies*); creating a new scholarly journal (*Organizational Research Methods*); and producing and running an electronic journal (the *Organization Management Journal*).

The final section of the volume addresses, in very broad terms, the relationship between editorship and academic careers. This section begins with a chapter on the editor's distinctive voice, and how the development of this is linked to an underlying set of emotions required in an editorial role, including patience, compassion, sensitivity, empathy, being supportive, and love of the subject field. At the same time the role throws up many tensions that are difficult to resolve, for example, how the time pressures of being an editor can undermine one's own academic outputs. Such tensions mean that there are explicit choices to be made by editors about how the role relates to a current academic career. For example, "can you afford to make other people's research a higher priority than your own for a few years, knowing that the experience will ultimately enrich your research program?" (226). There is a chapter on the selection process for new editors, with a specific focus on the editorial role within Academy of Management journals, and with implications for prospective editors. The penultimate chapter considers the knowledge authors might need to navigate the review process successfully, and especially under-

standing the “worse than agonising decisions” (244) that can be an integral aspect of editors’ experience.

The final chapter, an epilogue for the volume, reviews four dimensions on which editors can make strategic choices. These are expressed as four “trade-offs”: Do editors make evaluations of manuscripts, or do we manage the review process? Do we help authors to express their ideas, or do we encourage authors to exercise their own judgment? Are we concerned with supporting evolutionary change (scholarly outputs that are consistent with current paradigms), or revolutionary change (manuscripts that challenge the values and paradigms that currently dominate)? Should we focus on publishing outstanding articles, or rather concern ourselves with not publishing bad articles? I think that the volume editors made a good choice in finishing the book with such questions, which serve to emphasize the difficulty in imagining a consistent set of individual skills, behavior and knowledge that can be said to comprise the competencies of editorship.

This connects to a criticism I have of the book, which is that the individuals involved, the authority of their voices, and the clarity of their advice, do suggest that there is a strong orthodoxy implicit here. This issue is expressed in a particular way within the chapter by Arthur G. Bedeian (chapter 14), who notes that on average, half the manuscripts rejected by top journals are published elsewhere, and that this is especially true for “manuscripts reporting creative and unorthodox

research” (135). While it is certain that, as editors, we do influence the shape of future knowledge, I also wonder to what extent we participate in recreating limitations of expression and in stifling creativity and knowing. Perhaps one important question that this volume does not address is how we might break free of the shackles that such well thought-through ideas about editorship impose on the creativity and development of scholarship. There is always a danger that we expel ways of expression that are different, that challenge convention, and that represent other (equally valid) contributions to knowledge.

And so, this brings me back to a promise I made at the start of the review, which was to say more about my view that the volume has an appealing and unexpected conclusion. I was struck by the following part of the final paragraph: “Thus, editors’ most valuable assets may be awareness of their own limitations and the limitations of their co-editors and reviewers. Editing is above all an imperfect activity that incorporates human weaknesses and errors and has no optimal solutions . . .” (268). I find this statement to be both telling and reassuring. Perhaps this is because I can feel from my own experience how the editorial role does confront me with my own limitations of knowledge, time, enthusiasm, tact and influence. Reading this volume—and reflecting back on my role as an editor-in-chief of *Management Learning*—has made me aware once again that the role of editor generates considerable and valuable learning.