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Reflections from five associate editors on their role in the journal and on its future directions

Boukje Cnossen [a,*], Chiara Crovini [b], Sara R.S.T.A. Elias [c], Barbara Müller-Christensen [d], Elena Raviola [e]

[a] Organization and Culturre, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Institute of Management and Technology, Universitätsallee 1, Lüneburg 21335, Germany
[b] Aalborg University Business School, Fibigerstræde 2, Aalborg 9220, Denmark
[c] Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, Canada
[d] Leadership & Change Management, Altenbergerstraße 69, Linz 4040, Austria
[e] University of Gothenburg, Sweden

1. Introduction

In this Editorial, we celebrate forty years of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (SJM). Rather than looking back at those past decades, we want to celebrate this important Anniversary by reflecting on present issues and looking ahead into the future. Drawing on our experiences as Associate Editors (AEs), we reflect on what the journal currently is for us, as well as what it could be, including the potential contributions we can offer and expect from authors and reviewers moving forward.

Our reflections start with how we became AEs of the *SJM* and how we began to identify with this role. Interestingly, other than having been guest editors for special issues, none of us had much experience being on the "other side" of the publishing process. Our timespan as AEs ranges from four years to a mere few months.

In addition to asking ourselves what it means to be an AE in general and what our challenges are in fulfilling this role, we also asked ourselves what it means to be an AE for the *SJM* in particular. What do the journal's values mean to us and where do we see it go? What developments do we see and what is it that we wish for?

We enjoyed our exchanges and the co-writing process. It allowed us to get to know one another better and to connect in a different way than we do when discussing specific manuscripts or news about *SJM* in editorial meetings. These exchanges also allowed us to sense and reflect on what we see as the "Scandinavianness" of the journal: stronger connections, more dialogue, and an appreciation for and celebration of a plethora of voices. This is what we wish for the future, and what we believe will help the journal continue to contribute to shaping important debates in our field.

1.1. Boukje Cnossen

Over the years, my impressions of the journal were exactly that which I tend to think of as the Scandinavian (or Nordic) research culture: a strong reliance on qualitative approaches, often with a more-or-less implicit social-constructivist positioning, much interaction with (managerial) practitioners on the ground, often through a prolonged period of fieldwork, and an openness towards critical approaches and work conducted outside of the usual commercial managerial contexts. Admittedly, all of these impressions were based on purely subjective reflections, reading guided by my own interests, and haphazardly conducted conversations with colleagues debating where to submit. Nevertheless, all this factored heavily into my immediate willingness to come on board as an AE (much in line with what Sara and Chiara describe further below). If that is Scandinavian Management research, then I, as a non-Scandinavian, would like to help facilitate that (see also Barbara's point on Scandinavian as a mindset below).

And yet, the question to what extent the journal is Scandinavian, or rather, what that 'Scandinavianness' means, and why (or whether) it should be in the title of the journal, continues to haunt my mind from time to time. In a recent 'Meet the Editors' panel at the VHB conference (the main management research conference in the German-speaking countries), I even felt somewhat lost for words when answering the very valid question 'what makes the journal Scandinavian?'. When it comes to editing articles, it is absolutely clear that it is not enough to simply conduct good or interesting research in empirical contexts from the Nordic countries. The insights and theorizations must be interesting, relevant, and intriguing in and of themselves for the international community of management and organization studies. The journal also strives to be diverse in its leadership of the journal - including its AEs and editorial board - as well as in the authors and empirical settings that feature in it. At the same time, despite this openness to - and active push for - diversity, I believe the journal also has a large number of contributors and editors who come from the Nordic countries and papers that are based on research conducted there, and so the question of what

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: boukje.cnossen@leuphana.de, boukje.cnossen@gmail.com (B. Cnossen), chiarac@business.aau.dk (C. Crovini), selias@uvic.ca (S.R.S.T.A. Elias), Barbara.Mueller-Christensen@jku.at (B. Müller-Christensen), elena.raviola@gu.se (E. Raviola).

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makes it Scandinavian is a valid one.

Perhaps the way forward, in the spirit of openness and diversity, is to build on the past forty years in order to better understand what the 'Scandinavianness' of the research culture the journal has so brilliantly helped foster could mean for those living and working in other parts of the world. Said otherwise: perhaps it is exactly the 'Scandinavianness' of the journal that can add a different flavor, or even act as a small antidote, to what is often referred to as mainstream management research (something which is not devoid of its own geographical preferences or positioning!) in that it can challenge perhaps not the dominance, but at least the taken-for-grandness of Anglo-Saxon empirical contexts and theories. To me, this involves engaging in bold empirical inquiries and theoretical explorations of what management and organization is, and what these terms can help us do, as scholars. Personally, I hope for contributions that move beyond the boundaries of conventional organizations, and address questions of organized entrepreneurship, creation, intervention, and persistence in different and intriguing empirical settings.

Speaking as someone who is a non-Scandinavian – both in terms of cultural origin and academic background – this is what I hope the journal can continue to do in the next forty years. I am glad to have joined for the ride.

1.2. Chiara Crovini

My area of responsibility has been accounting and financial management, but how many submissions have been in my area so far? Just a few. It became clear that this task would have been difficult, at least at the beginning (see Sara's recounting of a similar experience below). Several doubts and questions emerged: how do I best contribute to the journal if the articles on my desk are unrelated to my area of expertise? How could I ensure high quality and a rigorous review process? Then, as it often happens, the answers followed very naturally because I suddenly realized that my experience, knowledge, and ethical approach to work could be fundamental to this role.

Furthermore, it has been immediately apparent that the already established network with colleagues, also from other disciplines, and the need to have new connections have been essential. I have also realized the reviewers' role in the publication process is important (also prominent in Sara's and Barbara's reflections below). But also how challenging it might be to find available colleagues or colleagues committing (of course for free) to help improve the quality of the articles and implicitly contribute to the reputation of the journal.

What about the length of the review/editorial process? As a researcher, I have complained very often about the lengthy review process, also because we are all supposed to "publish not to perish," thus meeting performance targets of each university and remaining visible internationally to establish new collaborations for new research projects, write applications to get research funds or become reviewers or editors of other journals. It is a circle that requires a certain level of commitment and obliges researchers not to isolate and work just for the publication itself. We all need each other in this big international community.

These reflections bring me back to the values of the *SJM*. In my future as an AE, I would like to encourage *Openness* because the Scandinavian approach stimulates open debate around several topics and methodologies. In my area, sustainability reporting, sustainability assurance, and sustainable finance have required researchers and practitioners to profoundly change their direction in research, teaching, and work. And what about more traditional topics? A suggestion, to follow up on *Creativity,* might be to rethink traditional theories, thus finding innovation in tradition, fostering creative refashioning of existing accounting and financial management concepts, and maybe introducing new meanings and nuances. Of course, these efforts require *Reflexivity*. What has always driven me as an academic is the opportunity and freedom to write works that can effectively have real impact and meaning for the academic community and practitioners.

1.3. Sara R. S. T. A. Elias

After the first few assignments came into my inbox (see also Elena's vivid descriptions of encountering editorial assignments through her workflow interface below), I started realizing that the role of AE is a bit more complex and nuanced than I had experienced previously as a special issue guest editor. For example, I sometimes receive assignments that are outside my area of expertise, both theoretically and methodologically. I was very well aware of this possibility, as this had been discussed and agreed upon during the first meeting with the Editors-in-Chief. But what this means is that I need to not only learn as much as possible about a new theory or method (which inherently requires time…a lot of time!), but also rely heavily on expert reviews, usually from scholars outside my own academic network. Securing such expert reviewers is not necessarily that straightforward. For instance, I often find myself "cold calling" - or literally "cold adding" to the journal's system - scholars that are personally unknown to me. Perhaps due to the lack of personal connection, such invitations often go unanswered, one after the other, as weeks go by. Despite the occasional lengthiness of this approach, it still keeps on proving its success - and I do wholeheartedly thank all reviewers who accept my uninvited invitations!

My experiences at SJM have provided me with a completely new perspective on - and deep appreciation for - the work of an AE and the "other side" (as Chiara called it earlier) of the reviewing and publishing process. I encourage all of us to continue doing our best to expedite this process, which is important for those authors who are under tight tenure clocks. I also recommend that authors continue to leverage the space that SJM provides to engage with openness, creativity, and reflexivity (as explained in Chiara's reflection above). This type of work is energizing for all "sides" of the publishing process, and its potential impact on current practices and future work to come is quite inspiring too. From my end, I hope to see even more submissions that encourage us as a field to look at contemporary issues differently, employing a variety of perspectives, such as critical, practice-based, and – the one that speaks to my own background – the intersection of arts, craft, and aesthetics with entrepreneurship and organization studies.

Overall, reflecting on my two years as an AE, I am truly grateful to *SJM*'s Editors-in-Chief and the other AEs for all their support and advice, to reviewers for their service and constructive feedback on manuscripts, and to authors for their engagement with reviewer and editor comments and the overall co-creative process that is publishing at SJM. I am hopeful about the next forty years and truly proud to help shape the innovative and trend-setting work for which SJM is known. Meanwhile, I continue to excitedly wait for the next assignment in my inbox.

1.4. Barbara Müller-Christensen

I have always been an avid reader of the Journal. I like its breadth, its openness to new topics, but also its unconventional yet classic approach. I like the different formats, the variety of articles, mainstream and critical. I have always felt that being "Scandinavian" is not a matter of nationality but of mindset. The *SJM* has always represented something that was important to me as a scholar. Being an ambassador for the journal was what I thought I could do. I enjoy – and always have learned a lot about the journal and myself – presenting the journal at conferences, discussing what is important to us, what makes us different. A particular highlight has been contributing to the CMS in touch series on publishing critical work in the Journal together with Karen.

To me, being the connecting part in the publishing process means encouraging dialogue. The publishing process is a collective endeavor that requires all the roles involved (also noted in Sara's reflection). While we can easily identify with the role of the author, the reviewers are usually the others, at times: the "evil others"; at least they are suspicious of us. Of course, we don't know them (and maybe also us) in this

role, so how do we build trust in them – in us… I have experienced so many different facets of how to fill the different roles, how to do a good review but also how authors deal with reviewer comments and suggestions. I believe connecting them and, to some extent, translating between them, is what is important. I've realized that I don't have to be the core expert on the manuscripts, but I have to be able to identify those who are (which both Chiara and Sara also note is one of the first challenges already), convince them to give their time and expertise by doing a review (which most of the time is the biggest challenge), and then to work with their comments (this is the time when the whole process starts feeling as a dialogue the most). I learned that I and the authors need to be able to read the reviews with a reflexive frame. I figured out that by asking the question, "What about my writing caused the reviewer to make these comments?" it is easier to address the comments in one's own way – not in the way of "pleasing the reviewers". Through the interaction, I learned that the more clearly and appreciatively we see our respective roles in the publishing process, the more we understand the other roles, and the more we try to enter into dialogue, the better the outcome, or as Chiara put it in her reflection, "We all need each other."

Despite the lingering question of how well or not I am doing in my role as AE, the overall contribution to this understanding is what matters most to me. Being an AE (or any other role in the publishing process other than the author) may not bring the recognition necessary to be a successful academic, but I would not be the scholar that this role has helped me to become. For that I am very grateful.

1.5. Elena Raviola

The possibility to shape the direction in which the Journal was going by accompanying manuscripts through reviews and revisions was really appealing to me, after a couple of decades of work in academia. I interpreted it as a practice of service to the community.

Having emigrated from Italy to Sweden about 20 years ago, I consider my academic training extensively shaped by the Scandinavian tradition of Management and Organization Studies (MOS), especially in qualitative methodologies. *SJM* and the Nordic Academy of Management are an integral part of this tradition in their inclusiveness and openness to diverse approaches and methods. My thoughts went to some of the legends of the old generation of Scandinavian MOS that had edited the journal, like professors Sten Jönsson, Kristian Kreiner and Rolf Lundin, their *rigor, wittiness and curiosity* and the ways in which, as I understand it, the Scandinavian management and organization scholarship published in its flagship journal is infused with precisely those flavors.

Walking on the path of this legacy might of course give some strength, but it can also be paralyzing and here the Editors-in-Chief and the editors' team really form spaces of *collective* support, discussion, and exchange of ideas. The monthly meetings, of which I have only attended two in my short time of appointment, and the exchanges with the Editors-in-Chief are crucial parts of this beginning of my role and make it really evident for me that the *SJM* is unique for its *international* reach and its disciplinary *broadness*, as both Boukje and Chiara also discuss. Yet, maintaining the humanity and humor that I expected.

Understanding the work of an AE as a part of a collective effort and ethos to serve a community of scholars shaped my way of addressing the first assignments that came into the mailbox and guide me through a sort of dizziness – like the one you felt when you got a new tall bike and you did not touch the ground quite yet. When I received my first assignment only about a week after being officially on board, I looked at the texts (coming from far beyond Scandinavia and addressing a wide range of issues), tackled the editorial IT system (not precisely a beauty of design, perhaps, but functional) and started assigning reviewers. Like the Editors-in-Chief had anticipated to me, shortly after sending the first requests of reviewing my email box was plinging with rejections to reviewing invitations. I had just found the best possible reviewers for a paper and now they did not have or did not want to review? Overcoming the rejection, I chose new ones, assigning them anew to the system and to my assigned papers. New plings in my mailbox: Some reviewers had accepted and some had rejected, again. Some long-inherited paper trails, rejection letters to write and new reviewers to find. I called one of the Editors-in-Chief in despair, but I got comforted and on track. Soon I understood that this is the unglamorous everyday work of an AE and, as an ethnographer interested in small things, this realization is indeed comforting.

2. Concluding thoughts

In this Editorial, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of *SJM* by reflecting on our lived experiences as five women AEs that have been entrusted with this role for the last few years (between 2021 and 2024). Rather than looking to the past, we draw on our current experiences to offer thoughts on what we hope to see in the next forty years of *SJM*. First, we encourage scholars in the role of authors to really push the envelope by embracing *SJM*'s principles of openness, creativity, and reflexivity. *SJM* provides a unique – and safe – space to do cutting-edge research with the potential to make a difference in the world – by tackling both "wicked" and seemingly mundane problems, all of which have great impact potential. As such, we encourage scholars to find the organizational and managerial in empirical contexts that lie beyond classic organizations, and engage in research in creative, entrepreneurial, activist, or simply unexpected environments.

We also hope that authors continue *SJM*'s legacy of setting new trends of impactful scholarship by leveraging, for example, contemporary developments in methodological approaches. Here, we recommend looking outside standard methodological practices to engage more with approaches such as video ethnography (e.g., Nicolai & Thompson, 2023) and embodied methodologies (e.g., Enang et al., 2023). Second, we call for scholars in the role of reviewers to engage in the process. Publishing is a collective endeavor. We need all the different roles to publish relevant and decent work. For us as AEs, reviewers are the most important part. Third, we encourage scholars in the role of editors, even in other journals, to reach out to their peers and organize ways of sharing their experiences (and potential struggles) with the aim of supporting one another. For example, not only did we learn immensely about one another while writing this Editorial, which ultimately helps with gelling as an editorial team, but at *SJM* we also have monthly coffee meetings designed to meet and get to know one another in a more informal setting than the editorial meetings, to share news and challenges, and to foster dialogue.

In closing, we believe that the future of the journal belongs to the entire academic community and requires a continual sensemaking process and identity work reflecting those that, in different ways, will continue to contribute to the journal and its impact in the decades to come.

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