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Rogers, Priscilla S.

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# **THE IMPACT OF PERCEPTIONS OF JOURNAL QUALITY ON BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION ACADEMICS**

Priscilla S. Rogers  
*University of Michigan*

Nittaya Campbell  
*University of Waikato*

Leena Louhiala-Salminen  
*Helsinki School of Economics*

Kathy Rentz  
*University of Cincinnati*

Jim Suchan  
*The Naval Postgraduate School*

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*This commentary describes and critiques criteria that, according to results from an Association for Business Communication (ABC) member survey, are having an impact on quality judgments about our journals. ABC members rank the Journal of Business Communication and Business Communication Quarterly as top research and pedagogical journals in business/management communication, a finding corroborated by a larger study of academics in business and technical communication. However, the growing importance of citation counts and journal rankings currently disadvantages our journals, presenting us with professional obligations and personal dilemmas in relation to them. The authors' purpose is to raise awareness of the various determinants of perceptions of journal quality, to explore*

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Special thanks to Marie Flatley and Bruce Reinig of San Diego State University for assisting us with survey administration and analysis. Priscilla S. Rogers is associate professor of business communication at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan. Nittaya Campbell is senior lecturer at the Department of Management Communication, Waikato Management School, New Zealand. Leena Louhiala-Salminen is senior lecturer and researcher of business communication at the Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) and also program director of the new HSE Master's Program in International Business Communication. Kathy Rentz is associate professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Cincinnati; she thanks the Charles Phelps Taft Research Center for their support of this project. Jim Suchan is professor of management communications in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

*the communal views of ABC members on this issue, and to seek ways of enhancing the value of business/management communication research in the academic marketplace.*

**Keywords:** *business and management communication journal rankings; journal quality criteria; citations; promotion and tenure*

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Most of us probably believe that getting our research published in the *Journal of Business Communication (JBC)*, *Management Communication Quarterly (MCQ)*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication (JBTC)*, or *Business Communication Quarterly (BCQ)* will help pave the road to tenure, promotion, yearly salary increases, recognition within our departments and schools, and perhaps even reduced teaching loads and summer research support. After all, these journals, we believe, publish high-quality business/management communication research. And they have the low manuscript acceptance rates to prove it. Unfortunately, that road may be starting to wash out or, at the very least, may have become pitted with large potholes and littered with debris. At research universities in Asia, Europe, and the United States, deans, department chairs, and senior faculty are using criteria to judge journal quality that put our work and us at a significant disadvantage. As proof, consider the following recent developments:

- A well-regarded business communication professor whose research has been recognized with awards from the Association for Business Communication (ABC) had her request for summer research support halved. The dean pointed out that none of the journals she published in were on lists of “influential business journals.” If she wanted recognition and support, she needed to publish in journals on these lists.
- An associate dean’s e-mail requesting information from faculty began as follows: “The *Financial Times* once again would like a listing of all the articles that our faculty have published in the 40 journals that [the *Times*] considers ‘leading’ journals in business.” No business or management communication journals are among the 40.
- Business communication academics at Asian and European universities were recently told that for promotion, their research needed to be published in journals that had an “impact factor.” ABC’s journals are not included in the indexes that provide these data.

Many of us probably have our own stories. But do we fully understand the nature of the criteria being used to judge research publications, criteria such as journal impact factor, inclusion in certain indexes, and international rankings lists? Are we sufficiently aware of the strengths and

weaknesses of these criteria to have meaningful conversations with those who make the value judgments in our schools? Do we know enough about how we regard the journals in our field to speak from the strength of community when we talk with these decision makers?

The ABC Publications Board believes that we have limited collective knowledge about the impact that external perceptions of journal quality have on our discipline and about our own views, though somewhat related research appeared some time ago (Krapels & Martin, 1998; Reinsch & Lewis, 1993; Reinsch & Reinsch, 1996; Smith, 2000). Meanwhile, a significant change seems to be occurring in assessing journal quality.

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To begin the process of narrowing this knowledge gap, we reviewed the literature on journal quality, spoke with our journal editors and representatives from Sage (the company that publishes the best-known journals in business/management communication), and surveyed ABC members. We wanted to find out how journals are being evaluated both inside and outside our field. What criteria are used to determine journal quality? How do perceptions of journal quality impact promotion, tenure, and funding decisions, particularly among us? What journals do we as a community of teachers and researchers in business/management communication regard as the best in the field? We were also curious to learn whether views would differ significantly between ABC members in business and in non-business departments and schools.

The ABC membership survey was developed and piloted with the endorsement of ABC's Executive Director. It was administered with the help of Marie Flatley during the summer of 2006 using Survey Monkey. Given the response rate of 21% ( $n = 132$ ), we view the results as indicative rather than definitive, but they coincide with Lowry, Humphreys, Malwitz, and Nix's (in press) recent worldwide survey of business and technical academic researchers. Here we focus on issues of importance to

ABC members, our intent being to launch a discussion among business/management communication academics about important influences on our careers, on the health of our journals, and on our field as a whole.

### **SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

We surveyed the entire ABC membership. Our data suggest that the majority of our respondents work in environments where research expectations are high. Sixty-four percent hold tenured positions (30% tenured full and 34% tenured associate or assistant professors) and 79% are from large universities. Sixty percent describe their disciplinary homes as business/management communication followed at some distance by professional communication (9%), English (4%), and technical communication (4%). The remainder hail from a variety of other fields, including business and technical writing, business teacher education, international business, information systems, linguistics, management, organizational communication, marketing, rhetoric, and composition.

North American academics comprised a significant majority of respondents (88%). Only 5% of our respondents were from Asia, 4% from Europe, and 3% from the Caribbean. Finally, some of our respondents did not answer all of our survey questions; consequently, the number of respondents per question varies.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF JOURNAL QUALITY RANKINGS**

To determine how often perception of journal quality affects decisions about promotion/tenure, funding, and workload, we employed a 7-point, Likert-type scale from 1 (*not often*) to 7 (*very often*). Sixty-seven percent ( $n = 49$ ) of our respondents indicated that journal quality was used *very often* to determine promotion and tenure decisions. Only 7% ( $n = 7$ ) responded with a score of 3 or lower, a result that is not surprising.

We get a somewhat different picture of funding decisions. Thirty-three percent ( $n = 24$ ) responded that journal quality was used *very often* and 19% ( $n = 14$ ) *often* or *somewhat often* (scores of 5 and 6 on our scale). Seventeen percent ( $n = 12$ ), though, reported that journal quality was *not often* considered (scores of 3 or below) to determine funding.

Finally, the results suggest that journal quality has the least impact on workload decisions. Only 18% ( $n = 13$ ) reported that journal quality was

*very often* taken into account to make these decisions. In fact, 16% ( $n = 12$ ) indicated that workload decisions were *not often* affected by journal quality. However, if we group the members who responded in the *often to very often* range (scores of 5 and greater) and contrast the results with those who responded in the *not often* range (scores lower than 3), we get the following results: 40% ( $n = 29$ ) indicated journal quality often affected workload decisions, whereas 27% ( $n = 20$ ) stated that it did not often impact those decisions.

Next we analyzed the mean scores or response averages to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between these categories. Our respondents indicated that journal quality was *very often* considered ( $n = 64$ ;  $M = 6.31$ ) for promotion/tenure decisions, *often* considered ( $n = 56$ ;  $M = 5.20$ ) for research funding decisions, and at best *somewhat often* considered ( $n = 55$ ;  $M = 4.33$ ) for workload decisions. Furthermore, these differences are statistically significant ( $p = .001$ ) when we examine all these means together and when we pair up any of the three means ( $p = .05$ ). What is striking is the strong consideration that journal quality receives for promotion and tenure decisions.

We then divided the responses into business and nonbusiness school categories and used a  $t$  test to determine whether there were differences between means for each of our three categories or uses of journal quality. We found that in all three categories, our business school respondents had higher mean scores, indicating that journal quality was more often considered for them than for nonbusiness school respondents (see Table 1 for detailed results).

The mean score differences were only statistically significant ( $p = .05$ ) in the promotion/tenure category: 6.79 for business schools and 5.94 for nonbusiness schools. However, relatively small sample sizes may have contributed to the lack of statistically significant differences in the funding and workload categories.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF JOURNAL QUALITY**

To deal with the administrators and senior faculty whose decisions impact our promotions, funding, and workloads and to chart our own course individually and for our discipline, we need to understand the bases on which the journals in which we publish are judged. Commonly used ways to evaluate journals in various disciplines are

**Table 1. Importance of Journal Quality for Promotion and Tenure, Funding, and Workload Decisions**

| Use               | Business |      |      | Non-Business |      |      | t Test              |
|-------------------|----------|------|------|--------------|------|------|---------------------|
|                   | n        | M    | SD   | n            | M    | SD   |                     |
| Promotion/tenure  | 28       | 6.79 | 0.50 | 36           | 5.94 | 2.01 | $t = 2.16, p < .05$ |
| Funding           | 25       | 5.40 | 1.94 | 31           | 5.03 | 2.23 | $t = .65, ns$       |
| Workload decision | 26       | 4.54 | 2.40 | 29           | 3.93 | 2.20 | $t = .98, ns$       |

- perception of senior researchers,
- inclusion in major indexes,
- acceptance rates,
- endorsements by professional associations,
- impact factor,
- international ranking lists,
- journal longevity,
- editor's reputation, and
- review board affiliations.

We asked survey respondents to indicate the extent to which each of these factors played a role in the awarding of professional rewards at their schools. The responses suggest that all these methods are used to some extent to determine journal quality in ABC members' academic units.

So what are these categories exactly, what are their weaknesses and strengths as evaluative tools, and how important are they to our membership? To answer these questions, we discuss the categories by order of importance based on survey respondents' mean scores, noting differences between respondents from business and nonbusiness departments/schools.

### Perception of Senior Researchers

As Table 2 shows, the strongest criterion influencing judgments of journal quality is the perception of senior researchers in the field, with 38% ( $n = 26$ ) indicating that seniors' views are always used when journal quality is assessed. It also got the highest mean value (5.85) on our 7-point, Likert-type scale.

The fact that senior researchers' perception was ranked first is not unexpected. Committees tasked with considering applications for promotion, tenure, and funding generally consist of senior researchers from inside and outside the applicants' fields. For example, Ted Zorn, a *JBC* editorial

**Table 2. Importance of Criteria for Determining Journal Quality**

| Criteria                                  | Overall |      |      | Business |      |      | Nonbusiness |      |      | t Test              |
|---|---------|------|------|----------|------|------|-------------|------|------|---------------------|
|   | n       | M    | SD   | n        | M    | SD   | n           | M    | SD   |                     |
| Perception of senior researchers          | 61      | 5.85 | 1.30 | 26       | 6.00 | 1.33 | 35          | 5.74 | 1.29 | $t = .76, ns$       |
| Inclusion in major indexes                | 59      | 5.46 | 1.63 | 26       | 5.96 | 1.31 | 33          | 5.06 | 1.77 | $t = 2.17, p < .05$ |
| Acceptance rates                          | 60      | 5.37 | 1.54 | 27       | 5.63 | 1.08 | 33          | 5.15 | 1.82 | $t = 1.20, ns$      |
| Endorsement by a professional association | 61      | 5.33 | 1.58 | 27       | 5.48 | 1.81 | 34          | 5.21 | 1.39 | $t = .67, ns$       |
| Impact factor                             | 57      | 5.14 | 1.79 | 26       | 5.19 | 2.02 | 31          | 5.10 | 1.60 | $t = 20, ns$        |
| International ranking lists               | 59      | 5.02 | 1.68 | 27       | 5.19 | 1.36 | 32          | 4.88 | 1.91 | $t = .71, ns$       |
| Journal longevity                         | 60      | 4.98 | 1.56 | 26       | 4.92 | 1.52 | 34          | 5.03 | 1.60 | $t = -.26, ns$      |
| Editor(s) reputation                      | 58      | 4.64 | 1.65 | 25       | 4.20 | 1.61 | 33          | 4.97 | 1.63 | $t = -1.79, ns$     |
| Review board affiliations                 | 59      | 4.58 | 1.78 | 25       | 4.24 | 1.61 | 34          | 4.82 | 1.80 | $t = -1.25, ns$     |

board member who is also highly experienced with international faculty evaluations, told us that expert opinion is extremely important (personal communication, November 10, 2006).

Perceptions of senior researchers are generally considered reliable. Experienced hands are viewed as experts who are very familiar with the publications in their fields, an assumption that has some validity. However, as Tahai and Meyer (1999) have argued, "These perceptions are often clouded by individual biases" (p. 281). For example, experts may rate more highly those journals in which they themselves have published, and in our interdisciplinary field, certain experts may not be familiar with some journals, therefore making their rankings more likely to be skewed. In addition, all the other indicators of journal quality—for example, the acceptance-rate statistics provided by a journal—could influence perceptions.

As Table 2 shows, "perception of senior researchers" was indicated as the most important factor by both business and nonbusiness respondents. Although nonbusiness respondents ranked it slightly lower than their counterparts (5.74 as compared to 6.00 for business), it is possible that humanities-oriented departments use senior researchers' perceptions more often as a stand-alone factor than social science-oriented departments. For example, an English department respondent from a U.S. university reported that her department relies almost exclusively on the assessments



of senior researchers in and outside of the department as well as on their own assessments of the publications under review. This question aside, both groups rated “perception of senior researchers” as the most important or influential factor in journal quality assessment. Perhaps this is because all the other factors can contribute to this one, making it essentially the master criterion.

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### Inclusion in Major Indexes

The second most influential factor affecting journal quality perceptions, as indicated by the survey respondents, was inclusion in major indexes, which earned a mean rating of 5.46 out of 7.

Use of this indicator to judge a journal, and therefore the value of the work that it publishes, makes sense. A journal’s inclusion in an index indicates a positive judgment by the indexers. According to Catherine Rossbach, senior acquisitions editor at Sage Publications, indexers and publishers consider a variety of indicators to assess a journal’s quality and impact, including its number of subscribers, longevity, and acceptance rates (personal communication, October 20, 2006). Inclusion in important indexes can therefore be a relatively reliable indicator of a journal’s influence.

This factor can have shortcomings, too, however. Indexers are not likely to be the best judges of a journal’s actual quality. Index to index, criteria for journal inclusion vary, and the criteria used are often difficult to find out. So it’s not always entirely clear why some journals are included and others are not (Howard, 2006). The ABC’s own journals, the *JBC* and *BCQ*, are currently indexed by Communication Abstracts, ERIC Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), ProQuest Education Journals, Scopus, and a number of others.

But at the date of this publication, *JBC* and *BCQ* are not listed by the *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI), part of Thomson Scientific’s extremely influential Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Web of

Science. (*JBTC* and *Technical Communication [TC]* are listed, whereas *BCQ* and *JBC* are being considered.) The ISI wields such clout—in part because of its calculation of a journal’s “impact factor,” discussed below—that omitting a certain group of journals from its databases can have unwarranted negative effects on individuals’ academic careers and on academic fields themselves.

Although inclusion in indexes can say a good deal about a journal, it is not by any means a completely reliable indicator of a journal’s influence. According to Sage’s Rossbach, this is why librarians and publishers tend to rely on usage statistics for a journal, as generated by various electronic tools, to determine how much a journal is being accessed rather than on its simple inclusion in an index (C. Rossbach, personal communication, October 20, 2006). For better or worse, though, inclusion in major indexes is widely used to determine journal quality, and our results indicate that this is more the case in business (5.96) than in nonbusiness (5.06) departments and schools.

### Acceptance Rates

Our survey respondents rated “journal acceptance rates” third overall (5.37) as a determiner of perceptions of journal quality at their schools, with almost half (49%,  $n = 33$ ) giving this factor a rating of 6 or 7.

Here again, this result makes intuitive sense, because this factor is, by definition, an indicator of how selective a journal is. The lower the acceptance rate, the more discriminating the journal—or so the logic goes. But as the literature points out (see Lowry et al., in press), editors can quite easily manipulate this statistic as their figures are often not externally verified and there is no one methodology for counting submissions. Some journals count first-time submissions only, whereas some include resubmissions. (*BCQ* and *JBC* count first-time and major resubmissions; the acceptance rate of each journal is currently 18%.) Some journals count columns, invited articles, and even abstracts used to gauge editor interest. (Our journals do not count these.)

Acceptance rates can also be affected by such factors as how often a journal is published, how many articles it publishes in each issue, and so forth. Lowry and coauthors (in press) have concluded that acceptance rates comprise “one of the most misleading and unreliable metrics.” Journals’ acceptance rates are also relatively difficult to find, making it likely that some evaluators (including indexers) using this indicator of journal quality may be relying on impressions more than facts.

## Endorsement by a Professional Association

Though it does not get much attention in the literature, our respondents rated “endorsement by professional association” just below journal acceptance rates (5.33 versus 5.37) as a determiner of perceptions of journal quality at their schools, with half the respondents ( $n = 34$ ) giving this factor a rating of 6 or 7.

Certainly the imprimatur of a professional association can affect perceptions. But if the association actually sponsors the journal (i.e., the Academy of Management’s *Journal, Review, Executive, and Learning and Education*), it is likely that other factors are coming into play as well. The backing of a professional organization can ensure a robust circulation for the journal, facilitate the journal’s inclusion in major indexes, and give a journal stability and longevity—all of which are the case with *JBC* and *BCQ*. ABC members’ relatively high rating of this factor is therefore predictable.

At the same time, with academic association sponsorship comes formal oversight of a journal’s operations. In ABC, for example, the Executive Committee and Publications Board scrutinize editor candidates through a vigorous process of screening, and ABC’s Board of Directors must approve editorial appointments. The Publications Board also monitors *BCQ* and *JBC* for quality, and editors undergo regular formal reviews based on a systematic collection of feedback from all stakeholders, including the board, the association membership, published authors, and even authors whose manuscripts were rejected. Evaluators influenced by whether or not a journal is sponsored by a professional association may well have this kind of quality assurance in mind.

## Impact Factor

As generally defined, *impact factor* is frequently a numerical measure of the extent to which works in a certain journal are being cited in other journals. The higher the impact factor, it is presumed, the greater the journal’s influence on knowledge making in its field.

By far, the most pervasively used impact factor is that calculated by Thomson Scientific and published yearly in its *Journal Citation Reports* as part of its ISI Web of Science. Schools’ heavy reliance on this one organization’s citation analysis and the increasing use of this metric to determine the distribution of academic rewards make this evaluative method the most hotly debated of those discussed in the literature. For this reason, we asked ABC members to assess this particular factor’s influence on promotion/tenure, funding, and workload decisions.

Thirty-five percent ( $n = 26$ ) of the respondents indicated that the impact factor is highly important for promotion and tenure decisions at their schools, and 16% ( $n = 12$ ) rated it highly important for funding decisions and 11% ( $n = 8$ ) for workload decisions. Though impact factor ranked fifth in mean ratings for the nine possible influences on perception of journal quality, it had the third highest number of “7” ratings (with 32%,  $n = 21$ , behind 33% for “inclusion in major indexes” and 38% for “perception of senior researchers in the field”). It also had the highest standard deviation. Thus, although impact factor does not appear to be as widely used to determine journal quality in our respondents’ schools as some other criteria, it is extremely influential for a goodly percentage in both business departments and nonbusiness academic environments.

Certainly this measure has much to recommend it. The extent to which peers cite one’s work would seem to be a most reliable indicator of that work’s value (Brown & Gardner, 1985). Touted as an *objective* measure, citation analysis depends on empirical evidence rather than on hearsay or subjective impressions. On the other hand, which journals and how many one includes in the counting of citations will affect the results, and journals that publish more pages per year may also have higher impact factors. In addition, simple counting of citations does not always exclude self-citations or distinguish between positive and negative references to journal articles. As Croom (1970) observed, “Not all citations are complimentary ones...[the author may have made] a major ‘bob’ which is subsequently being held up as an unfortunate example by later authors” (p. 1173). And because citing well-known authors can legitimize research, these authors may be cited more often (Brown & Gardner, 1985; May, 1967). This metric, which appears so simple and objective, can thus hide serious flaws.

Exacerbating this problem is the fact that schools using this method of journal assessment almost uniformly rely on the impact factors provided in Thomson Scientific’s *Journal Citation Reports*. Therefore, journals excluded from the ISI databases from which impact factors are calculated—as most business communication journals are—have a crippling disadvantage when this measure is used. In addition, the more a journal tends toward the humanities rather than the science and social science end of the academic spectrum, the less sense the impact factor makes (Thomson Scientific does not, in fact, calculate an impact factor for its *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*). Researchers outside of social science fields publish important work in books or book chapters, which the ISI indexes do not include.

Critics of ISI's impact factor point out a number of other problems as well (e.g., Funkhouser, 1996). For example, a recent editorial ("The Impact Factor Game," 2006) noted that citations to all the articles in a journal for ranking purposes tells us nothing about the relative quality of specific articles or an author's body of work (see also Rousseuw, 1991; Starbuck, 2005). It has also been established that this measure favors broad, more established academic fields (such as communication) and U.S. journals written in English (Seglen, 1997).

Despite its flaws, the impact factor is gaining in influence, particularly among schools worldwide and in business disciplines. According to the literature, the importance given to impact factors has become pronounced in Western Europe in recent years (e.g., Hecht, Hecht, & Sandberg, 1998). Seglen (1997), at Oslo's Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education, reported that several European countries were already using journal impact factors to evaluate individuals and institutions and to allocate university resources in the 1990s. In fact, it is likely that, had more non-U.S. members participated in the survey, this factor would have received a considerably higher rating. Clearly, impact factor influences academic decisions affecting the careers of business communication researchers and the intellectual clout afforded our journals.

### International Ranking Lists

Journal rankings serve scholarly and career purposes. Journal rankings are said to indicate the importance of journals relative to each other. Rankings suggest the extent of a journal's contributions to advancing the body of knowledge within and across disciplines. Following from this, the reasoning goes that articles published in high-ranking journals are more significant than those appearing in low-ranking journals (Johnson & Podsakoff, 1994; Zinkhan & Leigh, 1999). In this way, journal ranking lists help researchers decide where to publish and search for some of the best literature in a field, a use that is particularly salient for the many ABC researchers doing interdisciplinary work who benefit from some direction when reading literature in disciplines where their knowledge is less deep.

On the more political and reputation side, journal rankings can affect libraries' decisions regarding journal collections. Faculty publications in high-ranking journals may also influence the standing of departments and institutions—recall the administrator's request that faculty submit lists of articles they have published in the "leading" journals identified by the *Financial Times*. The fact that a school's faculty publishes in top journals

may affect the likelihood of obtaining or maintaining accreditation from the AACSB International (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International; Mort, McColl-Kennedy, Kiel, & Soutar, 2004; Uncles, 2004, p. 67).

More germane to the focus of this commentary, journal rankings are used by promotion and tenure committees to make decisions about the quality of a candidate's research (Borde, Cheney, & Madura, 1999). As our opening vignettes indicate, rankings also can influence administrators' decisions about faculty workload, release time for scholarship during the academic year, and summer research support (Borde et al., 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1992; Uncles, 2004).

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Rankings suggest the extent of a journal's contributions to advancing the body of knowledge within and across disciplines.

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Thus, the fact that "international ranking lists" wound up sixth on our list of criteria influencing perception of journal quality was somewhat unexpected. Possibly the inclusion of the word "international" in the question led some respondents whose schools use national rankings to under-rate this factor. Still, 34% ( $n = 23$ ) of the respondents gave it a rating of 6 or 7, and its mean score was greater than 5.

Survey results indicate slightly that business departments/schools may rely more heavily on such rankings than nonbusiness departments (see Table 2). Although the business/nonbusiness difference was not significant here, we know that journal rankings exist for every major business discipline (for the most comprehensive compilation of these rankings, see Harzing, 2006; go to <http://www.harzing.com/publications.htm>), with Information Systems and Marketing appearing to be particularly preoccupied with them. Communication also seems to make considerable use of this factor, whereas the more humanities-oriented departments do not (as far as we know, for example, there are no such rankings for English literature/composition journals).

As with the other journal-quality indicators, journal rankings as a single measure can be quite suspect. Journal rankings are usually based on expert opinion (as assessed through surveys), citation analysis, or a combination

(Lowry, Romans, & Curtis, 2004; May, 1967). How fairly experts' opinions reflect actual journal quality depends on which experts are asked and how unbiased and well informed they are. How accurately a citation analysis indicates a journal's rankings depends on how thorough the search for citations is and the nature of those citations. As Starbuck (2005) has noted, "Lower-prestige journals also publish excellent articles and high-prestige journals publish pedestrian articles" (p. 180). Well-known rankings are also known to exclude non-English journals (Uncles, 2004). Despite these drawbacks, the literature suggests that journal rankings impact how researchers' publications (and thereby careers) are evaluated (Borde et al., 1999; Uncles, 2004).

### Remaining Factors

The three remaining influences on perception of journal quality that our respondents rated—journal longevity, editor's reputation, and review board members' affiliations—earned mean scores of 4.98, 4.64, and 4.58, respectively. Results suggest that these criteria do influence journal-quality assessment at members' schools, but given the advantages of the other methods, it is not likely that these are make-or-break criteria, especially as this information is somewhat harder to come by and/or interpret than other possible influences.

## **PERCEPTIONS OF BUSINESS/MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION ACADEMICS**

Evaluation and use by teachers and researchers in a field is another important determinant of journal quality, a determinant that has been overlooked until recently. How can we speak of journal quality without knowing how we as a community of teachers and researchers in business/management communication regard the journals in our field? Which journals do we perceive as the best? Which do we actually read?

### Journals ABC Members Identify as "Top Quality"

When asked to write in (free recall) and rank-order the three highest quality business/management communication *research* journals, ABC members' responses demonstrated a great deal of unanimity. By rank sum (a tabulation method awarding points for first, second, and third respondent choices) the *JBC* ranked highest: *JBTC*, *MCQ*, *BCQ*, and *Delta Pi*

**Table 3. Rank Sums of Journals Named as Top Quality and Journals Most Read**

| <i>Research Journals</i> | <i>Pedagogical Journals</i> | <i>Journals Read</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>JBC</i> (130)         | <i>BCQ</i> (126)            | <i>BCQ</i> (91)      |
| <i>JBTC</i> (53)         | <i>JBC</i> (28)             | <i>JBC</i> (86)      |
| <i>MCQ</i> (50)          | <i>JBTC</i> (16)            | <i>JBTC</i> (21)     |
| <i>BCQ</i> (44)          | <i>DPE</i> (8)              | <i>TCQ</i> (17)      |
| <i>DPE</i> (18)          | <i>IEEE</i> (7)             | <i>DPE</i> (12)      |
| <i>HBR</i> (6)           | <i>JME</i> (7)              | <i>IEEE</i> (11)     |
| <i>TCQ</i> (5)           | <i>JBE</i> (6)              | <i>TC</i> (9)        |
| <i>IEEE</i> (5)          | <i>TCQ</i> (5)              | <i>HBR</i> (8)       |

Note: Acronyms in alphabetical order: *BCQ* = *Business Communication Quarterly*, *DPE* = *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, *HBR* = *Harvard Business Review*, *IEEE* = *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *JBC* = *Journal of Business Communication*, *JBTC* = *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *JBE* = *Journal of Business Ethics*, *JME* = *Journal of Management Education*, *MCQ* = *Management Communication Quarterly*, *TC* = *Technical Communication*, *TCQ* = *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

*Epsilon Journal (DPE)* followed. The *Harvard Business Review*, *Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ)*, and *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication (IEEE)* received single-digit sums, as seen in Table 3.

When asked to name the three highest quality *pedagogical* journals, ABC respondents overwhelming listed *BCQ*. Following at some distance by rank sum were *JBC* and the *JBTC*, *DPE*, *IEEE*, *Journal of Management Education (JME)*, *Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)*, and *TCQ*.

### Journals That ABC Members Read

When asked what journals they read, ABC member responses were not much different from the journals that they ranked as top quality. *BCQ* and *JBC* were top by rank sum and then, to a lesser degree, *JBTC*, *TCQ*, *DPE*, and *IEEE* (see Table 3). The fact that *JBC* and *BCQ* received the highest rank sums is not particularly enlightening because respondents were members of ABC, the association owning these journals. Apparently we read our own research. After *JBC* and *BCQ*, members' reading scatters, however. Respondents listed 53 different journals as diverse as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, and *JBE*. (Journals selected by 5 or more respondents are presented in Appendix A.)



**Table 4. Comparison of ABC and <sup>a</sup>Lowry et al. Data**

| <i>ABC Survey Research</i> | <i>ABC Survey Pedagogical</i> | <i>ABC Survey Most Read</i> | <i>Lowry et al. Survey Business Communication</i> | <i>Lowry et al. Survey Most Read</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>JBC</i>                 | <i>BCQ</i>                    | <i>BCQ</i>                  | <i>JBC</i>  | <i>JBC</i>                           |
| <i>JBTC</i>                | <i>JBC</i>                    | <i>JBC</i>                  | <i>BCQ</i>  | <i>BCQ</i>                           |
| <i>MCQ</i>                 | <i>JBTC</i>                   | <i>JBTC</i>                 | <i>JBTC</i>                                       | <i>TCQ</i>                           |
| <i>BCQ</i>                 | <i>DPE</i>                    | <i>TCQ</i>                  | <i>MCQ</i>  | <i>JBTC</i>                          |
| <i>DPE</i>                 | <i>IEEE</i>                   | <i>DPE</i>                  | <i>IEEE</i>                                       | <i>IEEE</i>                          |

Note: Acronyms in alphabetical order: *BCQ* = *Business Communication Quarterly*, *DPE* = *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, *IEEE* = *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *JBC* = *Journal of Business Communication*, *JBTC* = *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *MCQ* = *Management Communication Quarterly*, *TCQ* = *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

a. Lowry, Humphreys, Malwitz, & Nix (in press).

### Corroborating Result From a Larger Study

Our survey responses resemble those of Lowry et al. (in press), as shown in Table 4. They asked active business and technical communication researchers with PhDs around the world ( $n = 448$ ) to rank the top five business and technical communication journals. Their survey provided respondents with a list of 10 journals, with space for write-ins to avoid forcing respondents to rank journals that might be unfamiliar.

Top picks in business communication were *JBC*, *BCQ*, *JBTC*, *MCQ*, and *IEEE*. Journals their respondents read the most were *JBC*, *BCQ*, *TCQ*, *JBTC*, and *IEEE*. Breaking this “most read” data down by world region, *JBC* emerged as the most read journal in Asia, Australia, Europe, and other non-North American regions by academics in business and technical communication. In North America, *JBC* fell to third under *TCQ* and *BCQ* (Lowry et al., in press).

These data suggest that *JBC* and *BCQ* are read by business communication academics who also view them as two of the very best-quality journals in the field.

### CONCLUSION

Although there is no universal methodology for judging journals, and thus the works we publish in them, understanding the criteria used to assess them suggests ways to advance our discipline and its publications in our schools, in professional interactions, and in business at large. This

knowledge, coupled with data on how we as academics in business/management communication regard our journals, can also inform our professional decisions regarding where to publish, what research to cite, and how to educate others about the quality of our research.

### Where to Publish

Many factors can contribute to the perception of journal quality, but no effort to influence those factors will work for long if our journals do not continue to publish quality research. Although this commentary has emphasized the more political and institutional factors influencing journal quality assessments, we recognize that there is no substitute for well-researched, useful, and groundbreaking content. The best way that an individual can support the viability of our journals is to continue to make strong contributions to them.

That said, we must acknowledge that our local circumstances may present us with personal dilemmas. If we are under pressure to have our research achieve a certain “impact,” publishing in “high-impact” journals may be necessary not only to please our administrators but also to get our work included in broader intellectual conversations. We are a subfield that draws on many mainstream disciplines; publishing in mainstream journals is important and beneficial to us all.

On the other hand, establishing a strong research stream that our colleagues can follow in *JBC*, *BCQ*, *JBTC*, or the other business/management communication journals that they read brings collegial recognition. Its importance becomes readily apparent in conjunction with promotion, tenure, and other reviews requiring endorsements by colleagues in our field who know our work and can vouch for its disciplinary impact. There is also the issue of professional responsibility to nurture our field. One point cannot be disputed: A field that loses its venues for sharing the highest quality research will suffer. Our journals are critical to our identity as an academic discipline and as loci of our intellectual activity.

### What Research to Cite

Citations also matter. For a published work to be considered significant, there must be evidence that it is being read and used. Certainly, testimony by senior researchers can provide such evidence. But more direct evidence is the extent to which the work is being cited by other researchers. This is the rationale behind the growing emphasis on citation counts and impact

factors by evaluators, especially in business and other number-oriented disciplines. It is also part of the logic employed by indexers, such as those at Thomson Scientific, when deciding which journals to include and the basis for certain journal rankings (Howard, 2006; Kalaitzidakis, Mamuneas, & Stengos, 2001).

This raises a question for us. Survey responses suggest that we read our journals, but do we also rigorously cite them? Journal editors and reviewers complain that it is not uncommon to receive submitted manuscripts with no reference to the journal's previous publications (Riley & Schullery, 2006). Their concern coincides with Shugan's (2003), who observed in an editorial titled "Journal Rankings: Save the Outlets for Your Research" that "some authors favor citations to basic disciplines to garner prestige or gain credibility by association. You must acknowledge research in your own discipline," he continued, "if you expect other disciplines to do so" (p. 440).

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Our journals are critical to our identity  
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of our intellectual activity.

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Being in an interdisciplinary field, our research questions require us to draw from a variety of disciplines. This is strength. But we believe that this need not be at the expense of the literature that brings us together. Not citing research in our journals harms their standing. By contrast, fully referencing our communal research presents indexers, university evaluators, and others with a more accurate picture of its significance to our field.

Tools to enable citations include *JBC* and *BCQ* indexes (see Appendix B). Topics in our journals can also be searched via Sage Publication's Web site: *JBC* at <http://job.sagepub.com/current.dtl> and *BCQ* at <http://bcq.sagepub.com/current.dtl>.

### Educating Others

As members of a hybrid discipline, we often find ourselves being judged by those in host departments who do not readily understand the nature or value of our research. As we have made clear here and as many

of us have personally experienced, we should not expect the quality of our research to champion itself. Instead, each of us must gather data that will demonstrate the significance of what we do.

A good place to start, perhaps surprisingly, is the Social Science Citation Index. Although few business/management communication journals are currently indexed in SSCI, this index does allow individual researchers to find out who has cited their work, where, and how often in journals that the SSCI includes (<http://scientific.thomson.com/products/wos/>). Although the SSCI does not cover *JBC* and *BCQ* as citing periodicals, it does include them when they are cited by other periodicals (Reinsch & Reinsch, 1996). In addition to the SSCI, other sources that enable a search for citations include:

- Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>),
- Communication & Mass Media Complete (<http://library.boisestate.edu/reference/help/communicationmassmedia.htm>), and
- OhioLINK, (<http://olc1.0hiolink.edu/search/>).

Acceptance rates (which are quite respectable for *JBC* and *BCQ*), circulation, professional association sponsorship (e.g., the ABC), the credentials of editors and review board members, publication by a premier publisher (such as Sage), inclusion in various indexes, and journal rankings resulting from this and the Lowry et al. (in press) survey can also help us formulate persuasive arguments to our evaluators.

In sum, we live in an age when the trappings of success are often used as a shortcut for judgments about quality, replacing careful and thorough analysis. Academic fields have not been immune to this trend. Busy administrators trying to evaluate researchers' work and academic programs, who then use their assessments to argue for institutional and public support, have come to rely on certain measures of achievement, measures that may be suspect in many ways but nevertheless speak with force. Our research imbues our journals with intellectual merit, but in the academic marketplace today, intellectual merit is not enough. We also need to help our journals accrue symbolic capital, to use the phrase popularized by Bourdieu (1979/1984), by being savvy about the various ways this capital is generated. We hope that this commentary will attune the members of the business/management communication community to the importance of not only doing the highest-quality research but also representing its value in ways that the power brokers in academe—indexers, publishers, administrators, librarians, list makers, and others—can and will appreciate.

## APPENDIX A Journals Selected by 5 or More Respondents

| <i>Journal Name/Web Site</i>   | <i>Affiliated Organization</i>               | <i>Publisher</i>                 | <i>Dates Published</i> | <i>Peer Reviewed?</i> |
|--|--|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Journal of Business Communication (JBC)</i> ,<br><a href="http://jbc.sagepub.com">http://jbc.sagepub.com</a>  | Association for Business Communication (ABC) | Sage                             | 1963-Present           | Yes                   |
| <i>Journal of Business and Technical Communication (JBTC)</i> ,<br><a href="http://jbt.sagepub.com">http://jbt.sagepub.com</a>                           | NA   | Sage                             | 1987-Present           | Yes                   |
| <i>Management Communication Quarterly (MCQ)</i> ,<br><a href="http://mcq.sagepub.com">http://mcq.sagepub.com</a>   | NA   | Sage                             | 1986-Present           | Yes                   |
| <i>Business Communication Quarterly (BCQ)</i> ,<br><a href="http://bcq.sagepub.com">http://bcq.sagepub.com</a>   | ABC  | Sage                             | 1937-Present           | Yes                   |
| <i>Delta Pi Epsilon Journal (DPE)</i> , <a href="http://www.dpe.org/core/home.htm">http://www.dpe.org/core/home.htm</a>                                  | Delta Pi Epsilon                             | Delta Pi Epsilon National Office | 1992-Present           | Yes                   |
| <i>Harvard Business Review (HBR)</i> , <a href="http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/products/hbr/index.html">www.hbsp.harvard.edu/products/hbr/index.html</a>    | Harvard Business School                      | Harvard Business School          | 1976-Present           | No                    |
| <i>Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ)</i> , <a href="http://www.attw.org/publications/TCQhome.asp">http://www.attw.org/publications/TCQhome.asp</a> | Association of Teachers of Technical Writing | Lawrence Erlbaum                 | 1992-Present           | Yes                   |

|   |  |                        |              |     |
|---|--|------------------------|--------------|-----|
| <i>IEEE Transaction on Professional Communication (IEEE)</i> ,<br><a href="http://www.ieeepcs.org/activities_publications_transactions.php">http://www.ieeepcs.org/activities_publications_transactions.php</a> | IEEE Professional Communication Society        | IEEE                   | 1958-Present | Yes |
| <i>Journal of Management Education (JME)</i> ,<br><a href="http://jme.sagepub.com">http://jme.sagepub.com</a>   | Organizational Behavioral Teaching Society     | Sage                   | 1991-Present | Yes |
| <i>Journal of Education for Business (JEB)</i> ,<br><a href="http://www.heldref.org/jeb.php">www.heldref.org/jeb.php</a>  | NA   | Heldref                | 1994-Present | Yes |
| <i>Journal of Applied Communication Research (JACR)</i> ,<br><a href="http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/00909882.asp">http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/00909882.asp</a>                              | National Communication Association             | Taylor & Francis Group | 1972-Present | Yes |
| <i>Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)</i> ,<br><a href="http://www.springerlink.com/link.asp?id=100281">http://www.springerlink.com/link.asp?id=100281</a>  | NA   | Spring Netherlands     | 1982-Present | Yes |
| <i>Business Education Forum (BEF)</i> ,<br><a href="http://www.nbea.org/market/forum.html">www.nbea.org/market/forum.html</a>   | National Business Education Association (NBEA) | NBEA                   | 1980-Present | Yes |
| <i>Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)</i> , <a href="http://www.aom-pace.edu/amjnew/">http://www.aom-pace.edu/amjnew/</a>  | U.S. Academy of Management                     | Academy of Management  | 1963-2000    | Yes |

Note: NA = not applicable.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Indexes of *BCQ* and *JBC* Articles Since 1996**

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#### *Business Communication Quarterly*

- March 1996, 59(1), pp. 127-138: Index to Volume 58  
 March 1997, 60(1), pp. 177-186: Index to Volume 59  
 March 1998, 61(1), pp. 198-212: Index to Volume 60  
 March 1999, 62(1), pp. 115-126: Index to Volume 61  
 March 2000, 63(1), pp. 114-128: Index to Volume 62  
 March 2001, 64(1), pp. 129-139: Index to Volume 63  
 March 2002, 65(1), pp. 115-126: Index to Volume 64  
 March 2003, 66(1), pp. 117-128: Index to Volume 65  
 March 2004, 67(1), pp. 114-120: Index to Volume 66  
 December 2004, 67(4), pp. 495-500: Index to Volume 67  
 March 2005, 68(1), pp. 109-119: Index to Volume 67  
 March 2006, 69(1), pp. 103-110: Index to Volume 68  
 December 2006, 69(4), pp. 475-483: Index to Volume 69

#### *Journal of Business Communication*

- January 1996, 33(1), pp. 101-104: Index to Volume 32  
 January 1997, 34(1), pp. 133-137: Index to Volume 33  
 January 1998, 35(1), pp. 156-165: Index to Volume 34  
 January 1999, 36(1), pp. 86-95: Index to Volume 35  
 January 2000, 37(1), pp. 114-122: Index to Volume 36  
 January 2001, 38(1), pp. 96-104: Index to Volume 37  
 October 2004, 41(4), pp. 420-422: Index to Volume 41  
 October 2005, 42(4), pp. 452-454: Index to Volume 42  
 October 2006, 43(4), pp. 404-406: Index to Volume 43
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