FROM THE EDITOR

Taking stock, looking ahead

CrossMark

It is not hard to imagine the energy and clear-sightedness required to transform BRQ into what it is today. Created in 1998 as *Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la Empresa (CEDE)*, the journal soon became the leading academic outlet for papers on management in Spanish. No shortcuts were taken on the road to success. Quite simply, a high standard of editing was set from the start, in line with international review standards. The efforts of the successive editorial teams and the support of a whole association, ACEDE, did the rest.

BRQ has therefore been a success story, but it never resigned itself to simply covering the academic market in the Spanish language. In a world in which ideas quickly go global, any paradigms and theories developed are passed around among individuals whose capacity for transmitting them is based on institutional design, social norms and, obviously, language. While the first two of these formed part of the journal's DNA from the start, its publication in English as from January 2014 was an inevitable step towards its inclusion at the highest level of global intellectual debate in the area of management.

The new Editorial Board elected in 2014, far from sitting back and enjoying the success achieved, has to face a number of challenges that can be summarised in a single question. If BRQ were to disappear tomorrow, would its absence be noticed in the world of management? Our actions must guarantee, in the long term, an answer in the affirmative. We therefore have to improve our position both in the academic world and in relation to other economic and social agents. In the academic world, our agenda must ensure that our editorial activity improves both the quality of manuscripts and the efficiency of the process. To explain the reasons for this, I shall take the liberty of suggesting the following intellectual exercise based on the ideas of Mathew Spiegel (2012).

Let us take the best of our articles published in one of the top journals and think what might have happened if we had sent it to a different journal straight after its acceptance. If I were to do this with one of my own articles, I very much doubt it would be accepted as is. I consider it quite possible that my best publications (based on the number of citations

or de journal's Impact Factor) could be rejected outright without being sent for review.

In comparison with other areas that are more scientifically mature than ours (medicine, physics, biology, etc.), our review processes are tremendously demanding but totally inefficient (Tsang & Frey, 2007). In comparison with regular practices in our own area in the past, it is a fact that today our introductions are quite a lot longer, our analyses are much more sophisticated, our bibliographies are much lengthier... and, of course, we have doubled the number of co-authors. I wonder, however, if we have advanced in management knowledge more than our intellectual predecessors of a few decades ago. I believe the answer is no, and this opinion is shared by former editors of the American Economic Review (McAfee, 2010), the Academy of Management Journal (Tsui, 2013) and the Review of Financial Studies (Spiegel, 2012).

The great science journals, such as the New England Journal of Medicine, Science or Nature, are all general-interest journals like BRQ. Of course, in their review processes, they too make suggestions on style, recommend further reading, request changes, etc. But the emphasis is on the question being addressed and on the implications of the results, while also guaranteeing that the minimum requisites for any experimental study are met. Although the referees proceed in different ways, the editors of these journals make no attempt to re-write papers in the way they would have written them themselves. They also know that the referees do not necessarily have to be cleverer than the authors. Once the article's scientific originality and potential impact have been verified, the feedback is largely editorial and focuses on explaining the methodology used as clearly as possible to underpin credibility and allow for replicability. For years now, editors have acknowledged that honesty is difficult to guarantee; however much evidence they request, they receive exactly what they have asked for. The only thing that seems to work is the possibility that someone may replicate your study and subsequently question your reputation but, even so, there are many limitations. Under these conditions, it is normal for a paper to take three to five months to be published after submission; and this is considered too long in

many areas in which the rate of obsolescence of knowledge is high. The review process that I would like to institute in BRQ is based on the above considerations.

(a) We shall initially assess the added value of each article in terms of its problem statement, methodology and implications. We want papers that report scientifically original results that will be interesting for a large number of our potential readers. We can therefore accept a certain trade-off between originality and interest when, for example, a study covers the idiosyncratic peculiarities of the Spanish institutional framework regarding a problem that has been relatively well-covered in the literature.

(b) We shall limit risky revisions, perhaps only to new PhDs, colleagues in countries where the research system is still developing, or papers addressing really interesting problem statements. Increasing *desk rejections* shortens the review process, avoids raising false hopes among authors and reduces work for all of us. It is important to remember that articles are not sent to journals to obtain feedback. That is what conferences, workshhops and seminars are for. So, from the outset, apart from being original and interesting, articles must be well-organised and correctly written and must send clear messages on how the results can contribute to knowledge on management. Including management and/or public policy implications obviously gives great added value.

(c) Referees will be asked to read the article and tell us, basically, if they think anyone else would read it. The idea is to confirm point a. If the answer is yes, they should focus on making editorial and methodological suggestions that will guarantee the flow and credibility of the article. By flow I mean that the article should be easy to read for someone who may not be a specialist in the subject, and this is not just a matter of style. I have seen articles with an introduction that is longer than the literature review and the theoretical framework together; others do not discuss their findings; some reach no conclusions or just repeat the abstract, etc. I am not suggesting, as Einstein said, that the text should be readable for our grandmothers but, whatever their area of specialisation, all our readers, especially the members of ACEDE, should be able to understand the importance of what the author is telling us. In addition, when I talk about credibility, I refer to all sorts of matters. For example, it should be crystal clear what contribution is being made to current knowledge and how important it is; in the case of a deductive study, the hypotheses must be well explained and not trivial; whatever the analytical methodology, it must follow international standards; the implications of the article must be perfectly in line with the findings. In essence, I think we will be successful if BRQ can convince our authors and potential readers that relevance and rigour can go together with honesty and simplicity.

(d) Once we have received the feedback from the reviewers, we shall think about what the author should, or should not, do. Unlike other journals in which the editors mainly forward e-mails, at BRQ it will be the editors that take the decisions, not the referees. On the one hand, the quality of referees or their knowledge on the subject in question may be insufficient. There is evidence that the best researchers are more inclined to reject invitations to review (Northcraft, 2001), and that those who are not so expert only feel they have done their job properly if they have made plenty of suggestions (Van Lange, 1999). In a journal like Administrative Science Quarterly, a very low correlation has been found (0.1) between the verdicts of each pair of referees reviewing the same paper (Starbuck, 2003). On the other hand, the total asymmetry between the positions of reviewer and author must be borne in mind. To quote Bruno Frey (2003), we would not want any potential BRQ authors ''prostituting themselves'' in order to make a good impression on the referee. There is no point in making changes in our papers just to please someone who has written us an anonymous letter, especially when such changes may make our article worse rather than better.

If we can keep to this review process, BRQ should be able to generate a publishable paper after a maximum of two reviews, or perhaps just one. But, to cover myself, remember that there exist much more aggressive ideas. Spiegel (2012) suggests it can accept some papers every year without any changes; McAfee (2010) is in favour of offering authors the possibility of submitting papers and receiving a plain yes or no, without any review at all; Eric Tsang and Bruno Frey (2007) represent an opinion among authors in favour of accepting papers before any changes are requested.

Another matter on our agenda will be to enhance our impact on economic and social players outside the academic world. Ever since the presidential address at the Academy of Management in 1993 entitled ''What if the Academy of Management really mattered?'' (Hambrick, 1994), the lack of fluid contact with the business world has been a matter of on-going debate. We often forget that many of the institutional problems we face today are problems that can be classified under organisational management (Rynes & Shapiro, 2005) – corporate fraud and political corruption are not the main ones but are probably the most newsworthy. Other examples include improving efficiency in hospitals or universities, or policies to step up productivity, to improve industrial relations, to stimulate corporate growth, etc. There are obstacles preventing us not only from exerting an influence on business management but also from participating in the debate on public policies linked to the management of organisations (McGahan, 2007).

Perhaps the explanation lies in part in the fact that ours is a relatively new field of knowledge in comparison, for example, with law or economics. But the literature we generate on our own lack of impact is more self-critical; some authors argue that what we are doing is not sufficiently interesting in terms of management or public policy (Bazerman, 2005; Clark et al., 2013; Tsui, 2013) and that, when it is, it may even do damage (Ferraro et al., 2005; Ghoshal, 2005). Others insist that we have systematically adopted the approach of shareholders and administrators in our studies, relegating workers and other external stakeholders and thus no longer being relevant for a large proportion of society (Hinings & Greenwood, 2002).

The problems in this area have been fairly clearly identified, and I am sure no-one would suggest that we should stop thinking for the sake of thinking. But it is easy to understand that there should be greater contact with the non-academic world. And not only because we have a ''moral'' duty to improve our environment in any way we can, but also because we should return to society at least some of what it has invested in us. While we cannot be sure that the academic fields whose output mostly goes to satisfying their own needs are dying out, I cannot help feeling that their social relevance will be questioned increasingly and, as a result, that they will receive decreasing resources. I believe this is already happening in countries such as Spain with regard to the allocation of R&D funding and, in our specific area, there are powerful forces in Europe stressing that good university training in management brings more immediate returns than theoretical research exercises that have little public visibility and mainly target Anglo-Saxon journals in the English-speaking world (Clark et al., 2013). But it is these same resources that determine the depth of our analyses and to what extent we can further knowledge on management.

It is in this context that we should make the theoretical and methodological reflection that is typical of an academic study compatible with more intense discussion of the implications for management or public policy of the papers we publish. This endeavour should, of course, go together with parallel initiatives to make our studies known, so that our academic work can truly enhance the debate with other public and private agents. To the extent that we can maintain maximum methodological standards with total epistemological opening-up to any area of science that addresses management problems, such as sociology, political science or psychology, our contributions in the form of BRQ articles will undoubtedly spark increasing interest among the media and among players in a broad range of areas.

These challenges are by no means minor, but I honestly believe that the Editorial Board is prepared to face up to them. It is not only a matter of professional competence or of shared vision on how we would like the publishing process to be or on the journal's relations with the business and social world. At a time when collective projects attract less interest than individual success, there is a certain selection bias in accepting this responsibility which, in my opinion, is very positive. Also, since the responsibility of leading BRQ has reached the board members at a time in which filling in another line on their CVs is no longer their main concern,

I think we shall have the peace of mind that is needed to assess the work of other colleagues, wherever they may be from. Finally, I know that many of us share this passion of thinking for the sake of thinking with a degree of professional scepticism, and this should help guide articles by balancing the necessary intellectual freedom of any author with the academic and social impact we hope to promote in BRQ.

References

Bazerman, M.H., 2005. Conducting influential research: the need for prescriptive implications. Acad. Manage. J. 30, 25–31.

Clark, T., Floyd, S.W., Wright, M., 2013. Search of the impactful and the interesting: swings of the pendulum? J. Manage. Stud. 50 (8), 1358–1373.

Ferraro, F., Pfeffer, J., Sutton, R.I., 2005. Prescriptions are not enough: a reply to Bazerman. Acad. Manage. Rev. 30, 32–35.

Frey, B.S., 2003. Publishing as prostitution? Choosing between one's own ideas and academic success. Public Choice 116, 205–223.

Ghoshal, S., 2005. Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. Acad. Manage. Learn. Educ. 4 (1), 75–91.

Hambrick, D., 1994. Presidential address: what if the academy really mattered? Acad. Manage. Rev. 19, 11–16.

Hinings, C.R., Greenwood, R., 2002. Disconnects and consequences in organization theory? Adm. Sci. Q. 47, 411–421.

McAfee, R.P., 2010. Edifying Editing. Am. Econ. 55 (1), 1–8.

McGahan, A.M., 2007. Academic research that matters to managers: on zebras, dogs, lemmings, hammers, and turnips. Acad. Manage. J. 50, 748–753.

Northcraft, G.B., 2001. From the editors. Acad. Manage. J. 44, 1079–1080.

Rynes, S.L., Shapiro, D.L., 2005. Public policy and the public interest: what if we mattered more? Acad. Manage. J. 48, 925–927.

Spiegel, M., 2012. Reviewing less – progressing more. Rev. Finan. Stud. 25 (5), 1331–1338.

Starbuck, W.H., 2003. Turning lemons into lemonade: where is the value in peer reviews? J. Manage. Rev. 12, 344–351.

Tsang, E.W.K., Frey, B.S., 2007. The as-is journal review process: let authors own their ideas. Acad. Manage. Learn. Educ. 6 (1), 128–136.

Tsui, A.S., 2013. The spirit of science and socially responsible scholarship. Manage. Org. Rev. 9 (3), 375–394.

Van Lange, P.A.M., 1999. Why authors believe that reviewers stress limiting aspects of manuscripts: the SLAM effect in peer review. J. Appl. Soc. Psychol. 29, 2550–2566.

Xosé H. Vázquez
E-mail address: xhvv@uvigo.es