Welcome to the Muma Business Review

By
T. Grandon Gill, Editor-in-Chief

The *Muma Business Review* (MBR) is a new peer-reviewed open access journal specifically intended to serve the needs of both the practitioner-researcher. Its mission is to publish empirical findings and conceptual analyses that have been rigorously developed, that are communicated in a manner that is accessible to practicing managers and, most importantly, that address the real world challenges facing managers. It is specifically intended to serve the needs of the rapidly growing community of individuals that have received, or are pursuing, executive doctorates in business. Participants and graduates of these programs face a practical challenge: how to communicate what they have learned. Trade journals typically give insufficient weight to the rigor of what they publish. Academic journals, at the other extreme, tend to prize rigor above all else—including readability, timeliness and practical importance. The MBR seeks a middle ground, offering fast turnaround and valuing rigor--yet also recognizing the benefits of plain language and problems of practical interest.

This editorial presents the philosophies of the MBR and lays out a broad framework of policies that will guide the journal's submission, review and publication processes.

> **What is the *Muma Business Review* (MBR)? Why would you read the MBR? Why would you submit your work to the MBR? Why would you serve as an MBR reviewer?**

We are committed to interdisciplinary thinking and, in our quest to share relevant research that addresses contemporary issues in business, we support a broad view of what constitutes research. As such, our submission and other policies differ from traditional academic journals.

As an open access publication, we will not charge any fees for submission or publication. Our publication will be readily available for readers in academia and the business world.

Decisions on submissions will be rendered quickly—typically in less than a month—and authors should expect quick turnaround. We aim to publish articles within two months of initial submission, ensuring that what we publish is always current.

Central to our mission is mentoring practitioner scholars. We instruct our reviewers to be both constructive and specific in their suggestions so our authors can improve their research and communication skills.

In short, neither publishing with the MBR nor should reading what we have published should ever be a chore!

Keywords: Mission, authors, reviewers, editors, readers, policies

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Introduction

According to a 2007 study by John Mingers and Anne-Will Harzing, there were almost 10,000 journals publishing articles in the areas of business and management. It is doubtful that the number has gotten any smaller in the intervening decade. Therefore an obvious question needs to be raised: do we really need another journal in this subject area?

Inasmuch as we are launching the *Muma Business Review* (MBR), it is self-evident that we think the answer is yes. In this editorial, I will do my best to explain why.

Background

The motivation for the MBR stems from the recent diffusion of executive doctoral programs in the U.S. and internationally. These programs typically share a number of common elements. They are normally part time programs, typically three years or so in duration, and they attract participants who are relatively senior managers or members of technical staff, who continue working while pursuing their degrees. Like their academic counterpart, the Ph.D., they emphasize developing participant research skills. They also differ from Ph.D. programs in some very important ways. They are not generally viewed as a direct pathway to a career in academic research—a career dominated by the continuing need to publish in peer reviewed outlets. Quite the opposite, these programs more often encourage participants to continue their careers in industry. There they can apply their research skills to real world problems. Naturally, publishing becomes a secondary consideration.

Regrettably, emphasizing application over publication has its own drawbacks. High on the list of these, being required to write concisely and logically helps build rigorous thought. Being required to write for publication enforces a certain level of discipline of thought that is hard to achieve otherwise. Similarly important, publishing is an important channel for sharing experience with others. In fact, keeping an interesting finding to yourself seems rather selfish. But such sharing can only take place where a means of communicating with the appropriate audience exists.

The proliferation of academic journals mentioned in the introduction ensures that ample channels exist for communicating with other full-time business researchers. And the career benefits to an academic for communicating in this manner are huge. Outlets for communicating findings to practicing managers, such as trade journals, are also plentiful. Considerably more scarce, however, are outlets that appeal to both practitioner and scholar. There are some, to be sure. These include some of the most influential publications in management, such as the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR). These are, unfortunately, relatively few in number and highly selective in terms of what they publish. While such selectivity may enhance a journal's prestige, knowing that acceptance is highly unlikely also greatly reduces an author's motivation to craft a submission. Which makes most of the existing journals a high risk target for writing whose objectives include building thinking skills and becoming a better researcher. In other words, existing outlets were not a good fit for the needs of the budding executive practitioner-scholar.

The shortage of outlets for communicating research to practice became all too tangible to us 2015, when the *Muma College of Business* launched its own Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program for working professionals. Included in the program's innovative curriculum were three "publication courses" The purpose of these courses was to require participants to communicate research-informed ideas and findings at a level of quality that would warrant publication in a peer reviewed journal. In spring 2015, we taught the first of these courses, which involved having each participant develop a discussion case study. There were two key lessons we learned from this experience. The first was that most of our participants were already capable of writing at a publishable level of quality. The second was that we did not really have any good places to send them in order to publish their work. In fairness, there were some plausible outlets that did publish discussion case studies. The problem was that their publication cycle typically took up to three years (or more). This was a serious drawback for a DBA program that lasted only 3 years. Thus, we decided to launch our own open access journal that would publish peer reviewed discussion cases, the *Muma Case Review* (MCR).

The decision to launch the MCR opened Pandora's Box. It did not take very long for us to recognize that the two remaining publication courses in the program would confront a similar problem. Expanding the MCR to include practice-focused research articles did not seem like a good solution. The principal audience for discussion cases is instructors, who employ them as a basis for class discussion, and the students who prepare them for each class. The goal of the later publication courses, however, was to develop research-informed articles that would poten-

> Mission: To publish high quality peer reviewed open access research articles so as to be accessible to practice.

tially appeal to both practitioners and scholars. This was a different audience, requiring a different outlet. Thus we reached the decision to launch the *Muma Business Review* (MBR).

Mission and Vision

The mission of the MBR is as follows:

> To publish high quality peer reviewed open access business research articles written so as to be accessible to practice.

Our long term vision is to become an outlet whose work is prized both by practicing managers and by academic scholars. In the less distant future, we plan to engage both participants and faculty members in executive doctoral programs as readers, authors and reviewers. We also seek to build a readership base among the stakeholders in our local business community, as well as the stakeholders in the communities served by similar programs.

Our Values

In order to achieve our mission and serve our stakeholders, we have established a number of values that will guide the activities and behavior of the journal. These consist of the following:

> Our long term vision is to become an outlet whose work is prized both by practicing managers and by academic scholars. .

1. *Mentorship*: The participants in the MBR shall act as a community whose goal is to develop the research and communication skills of its authors, reviewers, editors and readers. All feedback to authors shall be directed at how their work can be improved, rather than on simply identifying its deficiencies. Editors will similarly mentor reviewers in providing constructive feedback.
2. *Open Access*: The MBR will be available online at no cost to its readers, nor will it charge authors for publishing their work. While retaining the copyright to the work it publishes, it will not restrict the ability of others to reprint its articles provided that proper attribution to the MBR as the source of the article is made.
3. *Timeliness*: The MBR will strive to turn around articles in a matter of months, not years. The environment of business is dynamic and is ill-served by long publication cycles. We recognize that our author stakeholders will frequently be in the process of acquiring research skills; rapid feedback is far more likely to be useful than feedback delayed.

4. *Willingness to take risks*: Many journals justify their quality through the percentage of submissions that they reject. In doing so, they become naturally conservative in their outlook. The MBR will always be willing to publish submissions that defy the conventional wisdom, provided that they are well thought out.
5. *Interdisciplinarity*: Whereas most academic journals have become increasingly subject to the constraints of the narrowly defined disciplines that they serve, the MBR will emphasize an interdisciplinary perspective, since few interesting business challenges confine themselves to a single function.

In presenting these values, we acknowledge our debt to the *Informing Science Institute*, whose similar set of values served as an inspiration.

To Our Future Readers

With so many publications to choose from, competition for readers will always be fierce. Consistent with our mission and stated values, the MBR will always strive to deliver the following to its readers:

1. *Articles that are written in a style that is both engaging and understandable*. Because practicing managers are intended to be the core of our audience, our review and editorial process places a high value on clarity of presentation. Although it is not always possible to avoid specialized jargon, we will do our best to minimize its presence and, when it is necessary, explain it to the non-expert.
2. *Articles that are informed by rigorous research*. With few exceptions, submissions to MBR include a required section—intended for reviewers only—that details the research methods and analyses that underpin the article. In order to be published by MBR, each submission must demonstrate that the portion that the reader sees is built upon a solid and rigorous foundation.
3. *Articles that explore practical challenges*. Whereas many of the topics published in academic journals are driven by the research literature, the MBR seeks to publish articles motivated by challenges and problems experienced in management practice—especially those that span business functions and academic disciplines.
4. *Articles that are available to non-academics*. Far too many academic research

publications are hidden behind publisher paywalls, making them inaccessible or extremely expensive to individuals who do not have a research library at their disposal. As an open access journal, MBR publications will be accessible on the web at no cost. Our copyright will also specifically permit (and encourage) readers to share them with their colleagues.

We will also encourage our readers to become part of the broader MBR community, perhaps by volunteering to be reviewers, or making submissions as authors. While we anticipate that most of our articles will come from researchers and practitioner scholars, we will always make opportunities available to thoughtful practitioners who wish to contribute.

Table 1: MBR Templates

Article Type	Description
Relevant theory article	Article proposing or explaining a theory that would be relevant to managers; similar in structure to traditional academic articles but lighter on the literature review and written for clarity. HBR prints many articles of this type.
Empirical findings article	Article describing interesting empirical findings. Written in a form that is similar to chapters in business books, such as those by Dan Ariely, that emphasize intriguing or counter-intuitive research findings without a heavy emphasis on theory.
Research case studies	Case studies that emphasize a complete story (as opposed to discussion case studies, which emphasize presenting the context of a decision) and frame in terms of theory. Unlike academic research case studies, much more attention would be given to the story itself rather than to the methodology of data gathering and the literature review.
Example case studies	Case studies that present an intrinsically interesting story without extensive analysis in terms of existing or novel theories.
Novel idea papers	Articles that seek to introduce a new idea for readers to think about, without necessarily providing extensive empirical or theoretical support. Such papers would be very hard to publish in existing academic outlets, but could be useful in identifying areas for future research.
Research debates	Articles that summarize debates that exist between researchers (e.g., "Is too much goal setting a bad thing?") or between the research literature and practicing managers (e.g., "Would you rather have highly intelligent or highly conscientious employees?"). Normally, the goal of such articles would be to clarify the perspectives of both sides, rather than to select a winner.
Research question reviews	A question that appears relevant to practice is advanced and the article summarizes what findings and conclusions are available in the existing academic literature. Denise Rousseau, a well-known researcher in management had recently started seeking out this type of systematic review contribution as part of her *Center for Evidence-Based Management* (http://www.cebma.org/frequently-asked-questions/what-is-a-systematic-review/).
Opinion pieces	Position papers that argue for a particular perspective on a particular managerially-relevant issue.
Industry analyses	Articles specifically devoted to providing a concise analysis, supported by data (often publicly available), of globally, nationally, or locally-relevant industries. This idea was inspired by the type of research that initially dominated the efforts of early business schools, such as Harvard.
Research summaries for practice	Short (1-3 page) summaries of the important takeaways from a recent research project. For example, DBA participants might be required to write such a summary for their dissertation work, and USF faculty might be encouraged to do the same for their recently published articles.
Interviews	Interviews and biographical sketches of important members of the business and academic communities.
Research method reviews	Accessible descriptions of a particular approach to research, emphasizing developing executive-level understanding of where the method might be applied to practice, along with its strengths and weaknesses.

To Our Future Authors

The launch of the MBR was driven by an immediate need. If participants in executive doctoral programs were to become more effective researchers, they needed an outlet that would publish research-grounded articles aimed at other practitioners. This need has influenced many aspects of the MBR's design. Perhaps most significantly, it means that mentoring authors in the development of their talents will always be a central focus of the journal. It has also led to the development of a series of templates that authors can use to help organize their writings. Our initial set of templates is summarized in Table 1.

MBR authors are expected to use a template for each manuscript they submit. While this might place some constraints on how they present their research, it will also help the journal achieve a consistent look and feel. The use of the templates will also encourage the submission of manuscripts that are not overly long. Over and over again, we have heard how important conciseness is to practice.

When developing a manuscript for the MBR, authors are encouraged to begin by consulting the template they plan to use. In addition, they are encouraged to think about how a complex piece of research might be broken up into separate articles. For example, literature reviews, theory development and empirical analyses could all find a home in a different template. We believe this also makes sense from the reader's perspective. A manager from one industry might not care that much about empirical findings from a radically different line of business. On the other hand, he or she might be very interested in a survey of what the academic literature has to say about a particular problem that exists across all industries. Some readers may be fascinated by new theories; others may care only about theory that has been tested in the field.

Authors writing for MBR should pay particular attention to the reviewer appendices that are included in the templates for nearly all the article types. The main body of the article should strive for readability. The reviewer appendix needs to demonstrate the research rigor that underpins the published article. Without such demonstration of rigor, it is unlikely that a submission will be accepted.

Finally, authors should expect to be treated with respect by reviewers. Such respect should be demonstrated in two distinct ways:

1. *Notification of acceptance or rejection of a submission should rarely, if ever, take more than a month.* Rather than expecting multiple rounds of reviews, editors are instructed to make a decision after the first round. Any accepted submission, however, will come with a "to do" list of revisions that need to be made, or which might be considered.

2. *All comments from MBR editors and reviewers should be directed towards improving a piece, rather than listing its deficiencies.* The distinction here is one of emphasis. Whether or not a submission is accepted, authors should always leave the experience feeling that their work has been improved by the process.

Peer Review Options

The MBR was established specifically to support the needs of three distinct constituencies: the academic community, DBA students, and the community of practicing managers. We recognize, however, that these communities often have different needs. Of particular interest: the importance of speed in the review process and the need for formality of that process. For example, DBA students and practicing managers can easily lose interest if the process is drawn out for too long. On the other hand, many academics will find that a publication will not count unless it has undergone a strict, double-blind peer review process. In order to make the MBR responsive to all our potential stakeholders, we need to be adaptable. We therefore allow authors to specify the form of review that will be applied to each manuscript that they submit. They will have three alternatives to choose from:

> MBR offers three review options: editorial review, constructive peer review and strict peer review. The choice is up to the author.

1. **Editorial review.** The manuscript will be screened by one or more editors. An "accept" or "reject" decision should be rendered within two weeks of submission, along with feedback in either case. Except in very unusual cases, acceptance be accompanied by required and recommended changes that the editor specifies. Targeted turnaround time is no more than 60 days to publication, assuming that all required changes are made promptly by the authors.

2. **Constructive Peer Review.** After passing a screening by the journal's Editor-in-Chief, the manuscript will undergo an initial round of anonymous peer review. In assigning reviewers, the editor will place greater emphasis on reviewer expertise than on potential conflict of interest, and prior co-authors or members of the au-

thor's institution will not necessarily be eliminated from consideration. Prior expert reviews—for example, from an author's dissertation committee—would also be considered. An "accept" or "reject" decision will normally be made after the first round of review, within 30 days of submission, but this decision will normally be accompanied by a development letter summarizing reviewer comments and offering constructive suggestions for improving the manuscript as well as changes that would be required in order for the manuscript to be published. Typically, targeted time from submission to final publication would be under 120 days.

3. **Strict Peer Review.** After passing a screening by the journal's Editor-in-Chief, the manuscript will undergo an initial round of anonymous peer review. Reviewers would be assigned in accordance with prevailing practices at top business academic journal and care would be taken to avoid detectable conflicts of interest, such as prior co-authorship or common institutional affiliations. Initial peer reviews would be expected within 60 days and multiple rounds of review may be required prior to acceptance. Authors will be provided with raw reviews after each round, along with an editorial summary. Targeted time from submission to publication for an accepted article would be 1 year.

> We encourage all authors and readers to consider signing up to become reviewers. MBR reviewers are a precious resource.

In each published article, the form of review selected by the author will be noted, along with a link to a page that explains the procedure for each. In this way, academic authors can demonstrate MBR's adherence to widely accepted formal peer review standards (for the sake of their institution), while practitioners can see their high quality submissions published quickly.

To Our Future Reviewers

We encourage all our authors and readers to consider signing up to become reviewers. MBR reviewers are a precious resource. For no financial compensation, and minimal credit, they devote their time to improving the work of other authors. We doubt anyone would do it, were it not for the tremendous amount of learning that accompanies serving as a reviewer.

Reviewers for MBR should keep three things in mind. First, their principal objective should always be to recommend ways in which a manuscript can be improved. Second, the MBR places a great weight on timeliness of feedback; it is the one area where the journal has a huge competitive advantage over its academic journal counterparts. Normally, reviewers will be expected to complete their review assignments in no longer than 2-3 weeks. Third, their thoughtful positive recommendations will be given particular weight in manuscript decisions.

The last of these warrants further explanation. At many—almost certainly most—academic journals, the reviewer is perceived to be a gatekeeper. In that role, their main focus is keeping inappropriate submissions from being published. In the parlance of academic research, this can be described as avoiding Type 1 error—publishing something that should not have been published.

In a simple world, by eliminating submissions that should not be published we will be left only with those submissions that should be. If reviewers consistently agreed with each other regarding what is and what is not "appropriate," this would be a workable system. Unfortunately, there is ample evidence that such consensus between reviewers does not exist. For example, about 15 years ago William Starbuck, the editor of the prestigious *Administrative Science Quarterly* ran an analysis of the correlation between the reviewers assigned to each article. The coefficient he found was 0.12—of little practical significance and statistically significant only because of the large number of articles studied (over 500).

In a complex world, these finding are not surprising. Different individuals will find different sources of value in different aspects of an article. An article ignored by one individual may exert significant impact on another. Given the limited amount of impact exerted by the typical academic research article, it would be a shame to reject a manuscript with great potential impact on one group of individuals just because (as a matter of chance), that group was under-represented among the reviewers assigned to the submission.

To address the problem of rejecting articles that could have had great impact—what might be called a Type 2 error—the MBR seeks reviewers that view themselves as advocates more than gatekeepers. Translating this philosophy into action, editors will be strongly encouraged to accept submissions that even one reviewer perceives to be of great value. With the power this gives to reviewers comes a corresponding responsibility. If a reviewer strongly advocates for the acceptance of an article, he or she must provide a convincing rationale for doing so.

The stronger the rationale, the greater the likelihood that it will carry the day.

To Our Future Editors

MBR will appoint editors from among its most outstanding reviewers as the submission volume warrants. The MBR editor-in-chief will assign submitted manuscripts to each editor on a rotating basis. Although fit with an editor's background will be considered in making these assignments, the interdisciplinary nature of the MBR makes it likely that precise fit with those areas of an editor's particular expertise will rarely be achieved.

For each assigned manuscript, the editor will routinely perform three tasks that are absolutely critical to the survival of the journal:

1. *Make a recommendation to accept or reject*. Initially, this recommendation will be provided to the editor-in-chief. As volume grows, some experienced editors will be given full accept/reject authority in order to maintain the timeliness of the review process.

2. *Create a development letter to authors*. Whether a manuscript is accepted or rejected, the editor is expected to list ways in which the submission might be improved. Normally, these will be a distillation of reviewer comments and the editor's own observations. Where a manuscript is accepted subject to revision, the editor will identify which recommendations are required for final acceptance, and which are just suggestions. When authors submit their revised manuscripts, the editor is responsible for identifying that the required changes have been made in a satisfactory manner.

3. *Mentor reviewers*. One of the great benefits of serving as a reviewer is the learning that accompanies the review process. That learning will be enhanced if the editor provides the reviewer some feedback. From a mechanical perspective, the review system will allow all reviews to be assigned a rating. Where a review shows considerable room for improvement, the editor would be expected to provide some additional feedback to the reviewer regarding how his or her reviews could be made more effective.

Looking to MBR's Future

Launching a journal is no easy task. Authors willing to submit quality content need to be found; unfortunately, career academics often see little value in submitting to a journal that has yet to be recognized as "top tier". As a side note, the process of becoming "top tier" rarely takes place in under a decade, if it happens at all. Editors and reviewers willing to volunteer their time and effort also need to be enlisted. And, perhaps most critical to long term success, a community of individuals interested in reading what the journal publishes needs to evolve. Making the journal open access adds another pressure—it is hard to make money when you give away your product!

In spite of these challenges facing the MBR, we see the potential for a bright future. We are not without some advantages. Chief among these is the community that we intend to serve. At the moment, there are few outlets that are well-positioned to serve the needs of executive doctoral students and practitioner scholars. This is a community that is growing rapidly and, under the auspices of groups such as the *Executive DBA Council*, is well on its way to self-organizing. As the number of students and, particularly, alumni in this community swells, so does the number of potential authors, readers and reviewers for the MBR. We will also benefit from our accrediting agency, AACSB International's recent emphasis on publishing research that has the ability to impact practice. We are also lucky to have the *Informing Science Institute* supplying our review infrastructure and acting as advisors to the journal; there are few organizations with more experience in launching open access journals intended to build supportive communities of researchers.

> As the MBR evolves, we will seek to engage a broad audience of practicing managers and academics.

During the MBR's first few years, we plan to focus on serving the needs of this community. Initially, the Muma DBA program's participants and faculty are likely to be the source of many, if not most, of the articles published. Very rapidly, however, we will seek to recruit authors and reviewers—both students and faculty—from other programs, all of whom are facing a publication problem similar to Muma's. This outreach will mainly be done through events such as the *Engaged Management Scholarship* (EMS) conference held each year, as well as through personal contacts at more mainstream disciplinary academic conferences.

As the MBR evolves, and accumulates a substantial base of published content, we will seek to engage a broader audience of practicing managers and academics. We know of many individuals in both groups

who would be intrigued by the notion of publishing their own ideas in a journal that targets practice. To accommodate them, we may well have to extend the selection of templates to include more that are suited to the thoughtful manager, and not just researchers.

Where this process will end is hard to tell. We are convinced that research directed towards solving real world business problems will play an important role in the future. We also believe that our strategy will leave us well-positioned to serve as an important outlet for that type of research. In the meantime, however, we will be satisfied to play a significant role in the intellectual development of the growing community of practitioner scholars.

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Review

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