How to Publish in Top-Tier Journals in OB/HR:
Dos and Don'ts

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Frequent Reasons for Rejection

(or a High-Risk R&R)

Seven Lessons I've learned over the years
1. Weak Study Motivation
2. Unclear Study Contribution
3. Too Many (or No) Theories
4. No Overarching Theoretical Framework
5. Argumentation by Citation
6. Imbalance and Mismatch
7. Lack of Methodological Rigor and Writing Clarity

1. Weak Study Motivation

The authors

- *"To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to systematically examine whether, how, and why X leads to Y…"*

- *"No research hasn't yet examined the relationship between X and Y and the moderating (and/or mediating) role of Z…"*

- However, there is no mention about *why* addressing this gap matters.

The reviewers

- So what? "First" does not necessarily mean "most important."

- Not all un(der)examined relationships are deserving of empirical examinations and warrant publication.

- Just because something has not been examined does not mean it should be or it matters.

The editors

- Discuss why it is crucial to conduct research to fill this gap.

- Discuss what your study adds to what we already know about the intended literature.

- Make a compelling case that your study provides a unique and meaningful contribution above and beyond those previous studies.

2. Unclear Study Contribution

The authors

- *"The primary goal of this study is to examine the relationship between X and Y and the moderating (mediating) role of Z…"*

- *"This study has two primary objectives…"*

- However, there is *no explicit* mention of the study's unique contribution(s).

The reviewers

- Silence is not always golden, but often a bomb. With no explicit and clear explanation along these lines, it is difficult to see how your study contributes to the relevant literature and practice.

- Do not assume the readers know your study's contribution(s) without explicit and clear statements about the unique contribution of your study.

The editors

- Carefully situate your study with prior studies on a similar topic and add clear and explicit statements about your study's contributions above and beyond relevant previous studies.

- Make a convincing case that your study is unique and useful in terms of theory and practice.

3. Too Many (or No) Theories

The authors

- *"According X theory… Y theory further explains… which is consistent with Z theory."*
- *"Multiple theories (e.g., XXX, YYY, ZZZ) can explain this particular relationship…. For example, X theory…"*
- However, *none* of the theories are compelling.

The reviewers

- Too many = No! "More" is not always "better" in terms of theorizing. Your study lacks a coherent theoretical framework, and instead throws the theoretical kitchen sink (i.e., draws on many tangentially relevant theoretical perspectives).
- There is a lack of precision in your theorizing or no compelling overarching theoretical framework that can guide variable choice and explain the relationships of the variables in your study.

The editors

- Understand there is a trade-off between breadth and depth, and when it comes to theorizing, the latter almost always outperforms the former.
- Select and focus on fewer theories and develop each theory in more depth to explain how it supports your hypotheses.

4. No Overarching Theoretical Framework

- *"We believe Z will moderate the relationship between X and Y in an important way. When Z is high… and when Z is low…"*

- *"'We believe M will mediate the relationship between X and Y… and help to explain why X leads to Y…"*

- However, there is *no overarching theoretical framework* to guide and explain the variable choice.

- Focusing on this moderator (mediator) is an interesting addition to your study, but there is <u>no coherent and parsimonious theorizing</u> that drives to the direction toward this variable as a moderator (mediator).

- Why this moderator (mediator), not other moderators (mediators)? It seems that we can <u>replace it with other variables using the same logic</u>.

- Each variable is fine in its own right, but there is no overarching theoretical framework that brings all variables together and explains why you chose to focus your theorizing on this particular set of variables.

- Develop your moderator (mediator) hypothesis with a strong overarching theoretical framework

5. Argumentation by Citation

- "*AAA (2013) found a positive relationship between X and Y. This relationship was also confirmed in BBB (2014; also see CCC, 2016). Thus, we expect that X and Y will be positively related in this study.*"

- However, there is no explanation about *why* these variables should be positively related in the first place.

- Listing references isn't the same as explaining it. Building hypotheses from past findings is not theorizing.

- In the absence of theoretical explanations, your hypothesis may simply reflect the idiosyncrasies of your particular data set.

- Ground your arguments and hypotheses in theory whenever possible.

- In theorizing, you need to answer this question, "what is the theory that makes you think X and Y should positively related?" If you cannot answer this question, you have to go back to the drawing board.

6. Imbalance and Mismatch

Balance between being overly complex and overly simple

- Without examining the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions, your study provides us with <u>very limited understanding</u> about the association between X and Y.

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Balance between scope and depth/contribution

- Given that your research question is about a <u>relatively narrow concept</u> (or context), it increases the burden to make an extremely strong narrow contribution.

Match between conceptualization and operationalization

- In your theorizing, you used A (e.g., engagement) but, in your measurement you used B (e.g., org. commitment). This is <u>a disconnect</u> between what you theorized and what you actually measured.

- If you rely heavily on a specific theoretical mechanism to explain the relationship between X and Y, then the <u>corresponding process/mediating variable(s)</u> should be directly examined.

7. Lack of Methodological Rigor and Writing Clarity

Methodological Rigor	Writing Clarity

• Increase analytic quality
   • If possible, avoid using <u>single-source cross-sectional</u> data. Use research designs that directly answer your research questions (e.g., at least cross lagged data for mediation).
   • <u>Rule out alternative explanations</u> (e.g., use proper controls, triangulate with mixed methods).
   • It's better to be <u>conservative rater than liberal</u> (e.g., don't use $p < .10$). Use statistical methods that are <u>most rigorous</u> (e.g., use HLM instead of OLS if data are nested).
   • Do <u>not bury or obscure the methodological problems</u> you know in your paper. Reviewers are not dumb!
	• Don't advance <u>too many</u> hypotheses.
	• The discussion section should <u>not repeat the results section</u>.
	• The discussion section should be <u>tied with the results</u>.
	• Don't draw sweeping <u>generalizations</u> from the results.
	• Conform with journal formatting guidelines (particularly, tables and references). It's like a stain on a white shirt.
	• Get (not too) friendly reviews and professional copyediting and include recent citations from the journal before submission.

The good news is that
The key to productivity is perseverance!

The best revenge to nasty reviewers is to publish your paper!

Thank you!

Any questions?