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The Pursuit of Excellence: A Letter from the Editor

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The Pursuit of Excellence: A Letter from the Editor

Christopher Grey

Royal Holloway, University of London

Dear Damian

Thank you for submitting your paper "The Pursuit of Excellence: Can Academics Join the Dots?" to this journal. I have been assigned as your handling editor and look forward to working with you. I have read the paper very carefully myself, as well as the comments of the two reviewers who you kindly commissioned. My overall decision is to invite you to revise and resubmit the paper but I should emphasise that this will be an **extraordinarily high risk revision**. Please understand that this is much more of a risk than even a very high risk revision, and certainly riskier than a high risk revision which is the lowest level of risk that a top-ranked journal can accord a revision. If you find this extraordinary then do please understand that as a top-ranked journal we can only publish rank papers and this is a risky business.

Before I turn to the reviewers' comments, I want to share with you some of my own reactions. You will appreciate that as a top-ranked journal we expect every paper to make a "theoretical contribution". Some papers may even make a real contribution but all must at least theoretically contribute something. Along with other top-ranked journals we publish several issues a year and so between the top-ranked journals a total of approximately 250-350 theoretical contributions (of the top rank) must be made. At the moment, I think there is more to be done if your contribution is to rise above the level of a lower-rank contribution. In our field a theoretical contribution, as you know, consists ideally of some boxes (or, exceptionally, circles) and arrows yet I could not find these in your submission. So my first suggestion is that you add several boxes and a similar (or greater) number of arrows.

There are also some question marks in my mind about the empirical basis and methodology of your paper. You refer on a number of occasions to being "fucked" but never really tell us how you are fucked. I am not necessarily asking for details of positions taken (although this might be of interest, as might be some illustrative photographs) but at least some gesture towards this, which linking to my earlier point might possibly be a two-headed arrow with or without box? At all events I think that our readers (who are leading scholars) are going to need a hand if you are to meet the challenge of this **extraordinarily high risk revision**.

With that said, I thought that the term "fucked" gave the paper a slightly negative tone in places. I'm sure that this was unintentional, but I do feel that the scholarly readers of a top-ranked journal will be looking for some positive takeaways and so I would suggest replacing the word "fucked" with the word "fine". I don't think this undermines the essence or "integrity of your work" (to quote your abstract). It will, of course, require a very

substantial revision, since it involves re-writing about half of the paper. However, as both words begin with the letter "f" this is less onerous than it might have been. I had considered suggesting the word "great" but apart from the fact that this does not begin with "f" I am also sensitive to the fact that there is a legitimate note of scepticism in your paper and I do not want to force you to compromise this by being over-positive.

Finally, I felt that your paper was substantially under-referenced. Your bibliography is approximately the same size (measured in lines of text) as your paper. In a top-ranked journal the norm would be to have a bibliography about three times as long as the paper, showing due attention to the work of other leading scholars in the area.

I will now turn to the reviews. Suze (or Reviewer 1 to use her real name) makes some apparently very positive comments but as a top-ranked journal we have to accept that this means that she is calling for a complete re-write of the paper. Assuming that you follow my suggestion of replacing "fucked" with "fine" this means, I'm afraid, that the word "We're" is going to have to go as well. This is going to present quite a challenge, I sense, but it is one I need you to rise to. Ozan (real name Reviewer 2) raises some very top-ranked points and you need to meet these in an appropriately scholarly way. I worry in particular that for this reviewer the paper is "quite interesting". Try hard to prevent your paper from being quite interesting as this is not really a suitable quality for a high-ranked journal.

You will now understand why I called this an **extraordinarily high risk revision**. I hope that you will attempt it and if so it is crucial that along with your revised paper you provide a point-by-point response to the reviews and the issues I have raised in this letter. In the interests of transparency, to which I note you are also committed, I will give you some pointers as to how to approach this response. As a rule of thumb, your responses should run to no more (but no less) than a book-length text. This is in line with normal practice for a top-ranked "response to reviewers" letter. For each point raised by the reviewers and me you should express your thanks and indeed overwhelming gratitude for the profundity of their insight and for the improvement to your paper that has resulted. The tone to aim for here is self-abasement, albeit in a cheery way (the exclamation mark is your friend!), rather than grudging acceptance. In this way a grudging acceptance from the reviewers is more likely.

Thank you again for submitting your paper to us. I hope that this letter will prove helpful in bringing the paper to the level of scholarly excellence to which leading scholars in our highly scholarly discipline (according to the leading rankings of scholarship, management and organization studies is, as you know, highly-ranked) aspire when seeking to publish in top-ranked scholarly journals.

Best wishes

Chris

About the Author(s)

Before working at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2012 I was a full Professor of Organizational Theory at Cambridge University and Fellow of Wolfson College. In 2007 I moved to Warwick University where I was Head of the Industrial Relations and Organizational Behaviour Group until 2010, and between 2010 and I held a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship. In 2015 I was made a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (FACSS).