

# Journal of Management Inquiry at 20: Still Crazy After All These Years

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Kimberly B. Boal<sup>1</sup> and Christine Quinn Trank<sup>2</sup>

Anniversaries commemorate important occasions. Once a year, we mark weddings, birthdays, and memorable—and sometimes tragic—events. We might think that because we note these events each year, the observation is about the passage of time—that we are somehow marking duration (or survival) as important. To an extent, that might be true. We marvel at the couple that celebrates their diamond wedding anniversary because it is an impressive amount of time. However, we also comment—sometimes cynically—at the love and forbearance required to sustain a relationship for 75 years. Marriage is hard. “Big” anniversaries get our attention because they are interruptions in our experience that cause us to take stock—74 means something different from 75. Love and forbearance were just as important at 74, we just didn’t pay that much attention then.

*Journal of Management Inquiry (JMI)* is turning 20. We think it makes sense to use this anniversary to make note of the love and forbearance required to get to 20 because *JMI* is hard. In the thicket of journals participating in the citation chase, *JMI* is resolutely different. We won’t pretend that citations aren’t just as important to us as they are to other journals, but there is something about *JMI* and the people who publish in it, edit it, review for it, and read it that tells us that these people who virtually populate *JMI* care deeply about the issues that are discussed in her pages, and willingly participate in the work and courage it takes to break frames. That’s why *JMI* is hard. Our authors often go out on a limb and take the editors with them (and sometimes authors aren’t far enough out on a limb, and the reviewers and editors must nudge them further).

*JMI* is also hard because of the editorial commitment to be different—to cover what is not generally covered in traditional management journals and to give space and freedom to forms of expression that do not fit with the traditions of academic writing. In the first piece appearing in this issue, Alan Glassman and Thomas Cummings (2011) trace the history of *JMI*, locating its genesis in the frustration many scholars had with mainstream management journals of the time. Qualitative research seemed not to be welcomed in their pages, and growing methodological rigidity left little room for experimentation and reflection. The forms of academic writing were becoming increasingly institutionalized. The voice of practice and experience did not have a regular, dedicated forum. *JMI* was conceived as a remedy.

*JMI* often works differently from other journals as well. Responding to critics (e.g., Bedian, 1996) that the author’s voice was being lost in the review and editorial process, coeditors Paul Hirsch and Kim Boal sought a mechanism through which authors’ innovative ideas and perspectives could be privileged and escape the often homogenizing process of review and revision. Their solution, inspired by the letters section of *American Psychologist*, was to formalize a more public process, allowing critics and advocates to comment on published work. It is but one of the mechanisms that have evolved to solve the problem of staying legitimate in the academic community while making space for those who challenge its conventions.

The trick, as Glassman and Cummings (2011) point out, is to maintain a level of quality and rigor that rivals the major journals in the field while clearly being an alternative to them. This accomplishment has been the result of ongoing work by writers, editors, and reviewers to get it right. The early pioneers at *JMI* were establishing an organization with a distinctive identity (Glynn & Abzug, 2002), in the field of management journals. Negotiating and protecting the new journal’s identity required cultural entrepreneurship (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) to attain legitimacy in the broader academic community while protecting its identity as an alternative to the mainstream. The founding story has appeared in print before, and it is repeated often in the hallways at meetings of the Western Academy of Management. We retell it here so that as we grow (and age) we preserve and reinforce our identity (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011).

These pioneers seem to have been instinctively aware of the social construction processes that underlie cultural entrepreneurship and used a range of strategies. Editors’ introductory essays to each published article represented one such strategy. Whether the essays were deliberate attempts at cultural entrepreneurship, these introductory essays helped to frame and reinforce *JMI*’s unique identity, and continue to do so. Even the journal’s choice to recognize papers that in

<sup>1</sup>Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA

<sup>2</sup>Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA

**Corresponding Author:**

Christine Quinn Trank, Leadership, Policy, and Organizations, Vanderbilt University, PMB 0414 GPC, Nashville, TN 37203-5721, USA  
Email: chris.quinn.trank@Vanderbilt.Edu

some way challenge the conventional wisdom—the “Breaking the Frame” award—replays the identity story each year.

In this spirit—remembering who we are and how we got here on this special anniversary—the editors of *JMI* came to the idea of reprinting articles from past issues that somehow captured the identity of the journal. We asked board members to suggest articles that might be included, and they responded with nominations that represented the range of genres that appear in the journal. The nominations were not necessarily of those articles that were most cited (although the most cited article, by Noam Cook and Dvora Yanow, was named and appears in this issue), they seemed to resonate personally and professionally with the nominators and represented *JMI* in important ways. To celebrate *JMI*'s commitment to dialog, we invited scholars who connect in some way with the themes or ideas represented in each article to write a commentary on the article.

We wish that we could reprint all of the nominated articles but were forced by space concerns to winnow down to these few. We tried to choose pieces that represented some of the major leitmotifs that have appeared in the last 20 years. In the following, we discuss these themes, and introduce our 20th anniversary issue.

### Staying Different and Defined in a Moving Field?

Given *JMI*'s resolute commitment to “inquisitive, provocative, and exploratory scholarship” (Cummings & Glassman, 1992), it continues to occupy a very distinctive niche among management journals. Without question, the journal landscape has changed since it was born 20 years ago. The most obvious change is that there are many more journals. Some of the journals have even taken up structural elements of *JMI*. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, for example, has a section dedicated to essays, dialogs, and interviews—three long-standing staples of *JMI* content, but the topics covered must generally be limited to education-related issues. Qualitative research is less uncommon than it was 20 years ago, and a few journals dedicate considerable space to qualitative studies, but it is hardly the mode in management research. Although there are more journals focused on the nonprofit sector, there is still a tendency in other management journals to focus on for-profit organizations and to managers alone as a research focus (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010). The concerns of *JMI*'s pioneers appear to remain problems, so *JMI* still occupies an important niche.

Clearly the field has gotten bigger and some elements of *JMI*'s coverage have appeared separately in the missions of some journals or on an ad hoc basis in articles or special issues in others. *JMI*, however, retains a coherent character, in spite of its eclecticism. The articles and commentaries in this special anniversary issue are a celebration of the diversity

of topic, genre, and method that *JMI* is. Collectively these can be interpreted as indicators of *JMI*'s identity, and a very good reason to stop and reflect on this occasion.

### Witnessing

The issue begins with Alan Glassman and Thomas Cummings reflecting on the early history of the journal in “The Wilderness Years at *JMI*.” We invited this piece because of the importance of founding stories to the identity of an organization. These stories help legitimize the organization, enlist others to its cause, and guide decision making (O'Connor, 2002). Like any organization, *JMI*, as it has cycled through editors and board members over the years, has had to work to maintain its identity, and often editors have used various aspects of the founding story to communicate the nature of *JMI* to rookie editors, reviewers, and contributors. The oft-referenced goal to be “*The New Yorker* of academic journals” is the way we talk about writing style and what makes for good topical coverage. Without question, *JMI*'s genesis at the Western Academy of Management, another resolutely alternative organization, continues to influence as *JMI*'s institutional home.

On another level, this article is an example of a particular type of story that has always had a home at *JMI* over the years. We use the term *witnessing* in the heading of this section in two ways. Witnesses to events often provide meaning and understanding to events by witnessing—giving testimony—to themselves and others. As Starbuck (2002) once said in these pages, “Events don't speak for themselves” (p. 213). *JMI*'s founding story, supplied by its witnesses and reconstructed in their testimony, gives meaning and substance to those events, but it is a distinctively first-person story. It is unabashedly framed as subjective and makes no pretense of academic detachment. As a result, it affects the reader in a very particular way. We are called to see and feel those moments through their eyes.

Witnessing is an important part of *JMI*'s approach. In 2002, *JMI* published an incredible series of articles, written by witnesses to the days following the tragedy at the World Trade Center in New York City, September 11, 2001. We needed witnesses as we tried to make sense of things. In the collection of essays, we see very different reactions to the events, and Starbuck notes that each observer described these different reactions from such unique perspectives that he wondered if they could even have a discussion about them.

What is important in these and other first-person accounts appearing in *JMI*, however, is the expression of the situated and unique perspective. Emotion and idiosyncratic response are often scrubbed from traditional academic research, but these are the stuff of insight into the workings of our theories. Although as readers we may not have been exposed to a consensus understanding of the events of September 11, we came to see the event and the witnessing of it in the context

of our theories, each giving us a different lens and thus, inducing a more complex understanding. Witnessing, whether to form and maintain identity, make sense of unthinkable events, or to bear witness to the beauty of compassion, as we see in Peter Frost's essay in the following pages, is at the heart of *JMI*.

### Knowing Who We Are As Scholars and Educators

The first reprinted article in this issue is "A Scholar's Quest" by James G. March (2003). The essay was based on a talk he gave at a seminar at Stanford's Graduate School of Business. The piece is a favorite for both of us. Kim was *JMI* editor when he heard about March's talk, and at *JMI*, editors can invite contributions when they come across interesting ideas or hear inspiring talks. Kim asked permission to reprint March's essay because it is a beautifully written piece and because it addressed, in an almost poetic way, the growing concern that business schools had lost their way. The essay had a profound influence on Chris's growing interest in the institutional environment of business education, and the essay's seemingly straightforward message caused her to ask, but "Why is this so?" and make answering that question a focus of her research. The reprinted essay and its commentary stand in for the hundreds of articles calling for significant path corrections in our professional lives as scholars and educators. These are part of *JMI*'s DNA.

When we were considering who we might invite to write a commentary on March's concerns about consequentialist thinking in both education and scholarship in business education, we immediately thought of Rakesh Khurana (2007) whose book *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfilled Promise of Management as a Profession* and ongoing service in developing an ethical code for business students would indicate common cause with March in their concern for business education. Khurana invited Scott Snook, whose recent research focuses on how business schools affect the identities of students, to collaborate. Their essay, "Identity Work in Business Schools: From Don Quixote, to Dons and Divas" (Khurana & Snook, 2011) recognizes the consequentialist logic that March laments and accepts March's celebration of identity, but challenges us to refer to important work done in sociology and particularly in the symbolic interactionist tradition that situates identity development in social processes.

Khurana and Snook suggest adding a third metaphor or logic to our ongoing discussion about the soul of business education, suggesting we look at business schools as "holding environments" where identity development occurs for our students. We see in this essay how two scholars consider, extend, and condition a stimulus argument as they work through its logic and implications, and arrive in the end with an entirely new framing of the problem. Such is the value of dialog and

commentary as a mechanism of inquiry, and why it is a pillar of *JMI*'s enterprise.

### Practice as a Source of Knowledge and the Practice of Academic Work

Our next reprinted article is *JMI*'s most cited "Culture and Organizational Learning," by Noam Cook and Dvora Yanow (1993). In their essay, which is one of the two "Breaking the Frame" award winners reprinted in this issue, they challenge the then-prevailing understanding of organizational learning as a primarily individual phenomenon and illustrate their theoretical arguments for a cultural understanding of learning by describing the work of flutemakers. The work particularly reflects *JMI* because it plays out as a challenge to the academic conventional wisdom of the time but also because it is a work that uses an unconventional context as a source of understanding.

Toward the end of their essay, Cook and Yanow argue that it is easier conceptually to see organizations as cultural entities than it is to see them as cognitive ones. We would argue that the authors might be underestimating the power of the "organization as brain" metaphor that dominated the literature at the time as well as their own accomplishment. The power of their conceptual argument stands on the extraordinary description of the flutemakers and how they work. The collective nature of their practice comes to life for us as readers. Although the author's conceptual arguments are eloquent, it is the quality of the writing in the sections on the flutemakers that transforms our abstract understanding to one that is, as Cook and Yanow describe it, intuitively easy. The writing is of such quality that one could imagine these sections fitting easily in *The New Yorker*. The masterful telling of the flutemaking story, coupled with their imaginative theoretical work, helped to upset the power of the metaphor underlying the cognitive perspective on organizational learning.

William Starbuck's (2011) commentary on the Cook and Yanow article is itself representative of an important feature of *JMI*—the examination of the processes of scholarship in management research. Starbuck explores the origins of the paper in the separate educational experiences of the authors and recognizes the roles of teachers and mentors in the development of their ideas. He then not only makes explicit the role of champions, including then-editor of *JMI* Craig Lundberg, in providing encouragement, but also shows that the authors played an important part in advocating for their work, keeping it alive at conferences and workshops, and revisiting and crafting the paper to its final form. Finally, he describes how those who have cited the work and used it in their own research perceive its contribution, and shows the sometimes very skewed trajectory of citations. This is a rich story of the life of a highly cited article and, in the tradition of *JMI*, explores the workings of our own practice.

### Giving Expertise Room to Play

Essays have been the dominant genre in *JMI* (Gephart, Frayne, Boje, White, & Lawless, 2000), and several of the pieces reprinted in this issue fall into that category. Perhaps it isn't surprising that these forms were among the most nominated by board members for this issue. Essays liberate the author to present a very personal point of view and in a very direct way. When the genre is in the hands of an expert, as is the case in Janice Beyer's (1997) essay, "Research Utilization: Bridging a Cultural Gap Between Communities," passion and a career's worth of thinking on an issue can offer a nuanced look at well-worn issues. In the piece, Beyer deftly refines the debate about research utilization by avoiding either the polemic questioning of the instrumental relevance of academic research or claiming some deficiency among practitioners. The essay is representative of a tradition at *JMI* to give leading scholars a place to play with ideas. *JMI* is unique among journals for offering some of the best thinkers in our field a place to talk about the substance of our research and the processes of management research—from the first notice of a puzzle to be studied to the question of the study's impact.

In her commentary on the paper, Jean Bartunek (2011) gives us a look at Beyer as a practitioner who was humble in the face of new tasks and actively sought the advice and ideas of those who came to those roles before her. In turn, she shared with others. Bartunek notes the profound influence Beyer had on editorial processes in a range of journals when she was editor of *Academy of Management Journal*. But the influence of her work on the question of research utilization is formidable, and Bartunek and others have taken up the cause of exploring the nature of the relationship between academic research and organization practice. Beyer's (1997) notion that the gap between practice and scholarship is a cultural one causes us to rethink the metaphor of mechanical transfer between academics and practitioners in much the same way Cook and Yanow make us question the individual approach in organizational learning.

Since those days when the discussion of research utilization was—well—academic, scholars have taken up the task of empirically examining the gap from a more culture-based perspective. Bartunek and Rynes (2010), for example, examine the ways scholars talk about implications for practice in their publications. Studies such as these are critical in this ongoing discussion because an important implication of Beyer's understanding of the problem as a cultural one (rather than a problem of simple mechanical transfer) is that we must understand how each community constructs and represents the other.

### Love and Organizations

*JMI's* essay format and its openness to ideas that fall outside the norms of coverage in mainstream management journals have made its pages a welcoming place for those who want

to bring the best of the human spirit and even spirituality and religion into the study of organization life. These essays have dealt with not only what we study but also how we study it. Peter Frost's (1999) uplifting essay, "Why Compassion Counts!" asks us to observe the everyday actions we see at work and to recognize moments of love and compassion. Frost uses very personal stories and profound personal conviction to convince us that compassion is an intrinsic part of organizational life just as suffering is. Again we see witnessing in both senses of the word. He shows us that as observers of organizational life, when we don't see compassion and humanity—perhaps because of the way we have constructed the practice of research—what we discover is always incomplete.

The commentary that accompanies Frost's essay by Jane Dutton and Kristina Workman (2011) shows us how Frost's character and humanity were intrinsic to his contribution to scholarship and how they will live on in the lives he touched. Dutton and Workman revisit Frost's compassion story to show the many ways that a compassionate act, the observation of the act, and the sharing of the narrative of it have been generative forces. It is difficult not to see Dutton and Workman's commentary as a generative force itself. By weaving together their reactions to Frost's piece with the stories of Frost's own acts of compassion told by colleagues and students, compassion—as a construct to study and an ideal to live toward—becomes very real.

### Nontraditional Research

We know of no journals that wouldn't love to publish creative research, but the publication process and the norms of subject matter and method can be an impediment to the publication of studies that deviate from them. As Glassman and Cummings (2011) note in their essay on the early years of *JMI*, one impetus for the establishment of the "Nontraditional Research" section was the need for a forum dedicated to encouraging nontraditional research methods, examination of nontraditional contexts, and giving voice to all those connected to organizations—not just managers. "Nontraditional" is understood in the practice of the editors of this section as good work that because of its subject matter, method, or approach might not find an easy home in other journals. Two of our reprinted articles originally appeared in the Nontraditional Research section of the journal.

The first Nontraditional Research piece was a "Breaking the Frame" award winner for the year it was published. The research of Doug Creed and Maureen Scully (2000) in "Songs of Ourselves: The Deployment of Social Identity in Workplace Encounters" is remarkable for many reasons, as Michael Lounsbury notes in his commentary, and has had considerable impact on research in diversity, identity, and organizational change. Its focus on encounters as the location of change processes and the use of identity in those encounters stand in

contrast to management paradigms that see change processes primarily from the lens of management, and primarily as a top-down intervention. The gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender employees they interviewed were agents of change in their organizations. Another notable and “very *JMI*” element of the piece is the observation by the authors that they were engaged in encounters themselves as they conducted their research and those they were interviewing looked for the authors’ reactions. In their act of “breaking the fourth wall” by disclosing a piece of information that might not fit in a “disinterested observer” narrative, we see yet another level at which the paper works.

The second Nontraditional Research paper that we reprint here, like “Songs of Ourselves,” looks at the microprocesses through which a group often marginalized in organizations—temporary workers—negotiate their work lives in this nontraditional relationship. Vanessa Hill and Kathleen Carley (2008) in “Win Friends and Influence People: Relationships as Conduits of Organizational Culture in Temporary Placement Agencies” use a mixed methods approach to examine the processes through which temporary workers are integrated into the practices and values of different cultures. In the context of this special issue and the effort to celebrate *JMI*’s identity, the inclusion of this piece might be a bit unsettling. Among current and former editors, the rule of thumb for the Nontraditional Research section is that there will be no “*R-square*” research—meaning that the focus of the section should be on qualitative methods. Yet, here is a mixed methods approach that not only involves some qualitative work but also has a strong quantitative component. What is important in the paper is the focus on a group in a context rarely studied and the skillful use of interviews and participant observation to give meaning to and allow nuanced interpretation of the more quantitative parts of the study.

In the introductions to these two studies, two editors provide examples of how the editors of *JMI* frame and position what is published. Lounsbury (2011) very specifically describes the Creed and Scully article, with its use of novel methods and its inventive take on theory, as an exemplar of the research published in the Nontraditional Research section. The paper also celebrates *JMI*’s interest in giving voice to marginalized social identities as well as reflective practices in the research process. Note, however, that in Marvin Washington’s (2011) comments on the Hill and Carley (2008) paper, he shows that he is keenly aware of the sketchy concept “nontraditional,” and discloses the confusion that even editors of the section have about its nature. Using words like *hip* and *funky*, to describe the type of research that belongs in the section to signify his understanding of the section’s mission, he makes the reader aware that the paper he presents may deviate from the “No *R-Square*” rule of thumb by talking about how and why it fits. Taken together, these commentaries show how the editorial introduction is used in *JMI* to manage the coherence of the journal’s identity. Most important, the commentaries

show why the Nontraditional Research section is still very much needed in the field of management journals.

### *It’s a Funny Business*

For the last several years, Charles Vance has been supplying *JMI* with his “Out of Whack” cartoons. There is something deliciously subversive about a well-crafted cartoon, and Vance has managed to communicate in just a simple drawing and a few lines what most of us in the academic community need many pages to say—and not nearly as wryly. He’s taken on everything from the absurdity of assessment to the occasional pomposity of the academic ego. We asked him to choose a few of his favorite cartoons for reprinting and then enlisted Judith White to engage him in a conversation about his process and the sources of his inspiration. It is noteworthy that the process of developing ideas for a cartoon and executing them looks a great deal like the process of crafting an essay.

### **Still Crazy After All These Years**

When we began talking about what we might say about the *JMI* and its impact in the world of scholarship, education, and practice, we thought about the most common metric we use in assessing journals—how many citations does it have? We love citations, of course, but many of the genres used in *JMI* are not amenable to citation. The dominance of essays in the journal is one impediment to a high citation rate and impact factor, though some essays have very high citation rates and are quite influential in establishing a line of research and thought. Yet, there were some papers nominated as exceptional by board members that had few or no citations! And how do you count how many office doors had a Charlie Vance cartoon taped to them? How *should* we measure impact?

It occurred to us that given the nature of content in *JMI*—essays, dialogs, reflections on practice, and nontraditional research that puts a ding in some conventional wisdom—its impact might be less direct than citation counts. In particular, the material in *JMI* represents the type of “behind the scenes” inquiry and argument that is most valuable to students in advanced study. We did a Google search of the terms *syllabus* and *Journal of Management Inquiry* and found that *JMI* articles were being used in graduate classes in many fields. Some were the essays and dialogs about issues in particular research areas, but by far the most common use of *JMI* articles was in colloquia, introductions to research, or philosophy of science courses for graduate students. One can easily see, for example, how Starbuck’s commentary on “Culture and Organizational Learning” might be used in socializing new PhD students into the very social world of publication. It occurred to us that our impact might be less on future publications and more on future generations of scholars. That is a very nice thing to think about.

After engaging in this taking-stock process on the occasion of *JMI*'s 20th anniversary, we can say that the journal has an impact. It still inspires and incites. *JMI* is still different from the mainstream and edgy in the best sense. It is still, as Marvin Washington put it, "hip and funky," and to borrow from Paul Simon, we are still crazy after all these years.

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## Bios

**Kimberly B. Boal** (PhD, University of Wisconsin) is the Rawls professor of management at the Rawls College of Business, Texas Tech University. He was coeditor-in-chief of the *Journal of Management Inquiry* from 1997 to 2006. He served on the Board of Governors of the Academy of Management from 2001 to 2004 and as president of the Western Academy of Management in 1999-2000. He was twice awarded the Joan G. Dahl Presidential Award by the Western Academy of Management. His work has covered such managerial topics as workers' attitudes and motivation, strategic leadership, organizational change and learning, strategic planning, mergers and acquisitions, and corporate social responsibility. He is published in leading academic journals such as *Academy of Management Executive*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Management*, *Leadership Quarterly*, *Strategic Management Journal* as well as other journals and numerous book chapters.

**Christine Quinn Trank** is senior lecturer in organizational leadership in the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development. She is a current associate editor for the "Nontraditional Research" section of *Journal of Management Inquiry*. Her research focuses on microprocesses in institutions, primarily in the context of education and cultural industries.