



## EDITORIAL

# Letter from the Editor-in-Chief: Scientists behaving badly

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### OVERVIEW OF 41.4

There are 10 articles in this issue of *JIBS*, four of which were originally submitted to the previous editorial team and subsequently transferred to my watch. The remaining articles were wholly handled by the current editors. Many of the articles cluster around the general theme of globalization and global strategies of multinationals.

The issue begins with “An evolutionary approach to understanding international business (IB) activity: The co-evolution of MNEs and the institutional environment” by Cantwell, Dunning and Lundan. Two articles on technology and innovation follow: “International technology licensing: Monopoly rents, transaction costs and exclusive rights” by Aulakh, Jiang and Pan, and “An international multilevel analysis of product innovation” by Lederman. Global marketing strategies in the context of pressures for localization are examined in Shi, White, Zou and Cavusgil in “Global account management strategies: Drivers and outcomes” and Funk, Arthurs, Treviño and Joireman in “Consumer animosity in the global value chain: The effect of international production shifts on willingness to purchase hybrid products”. Three international human resource management articles are next: Ralston, Lee, Perrewé, Van Deusen, Vollmer, Maignan, Tang, Wan and Rossi, “A multi-society examination of the impact of psychological resources on stressor-strain relationships”; Du and Choi, “Pay for performance in emerging markets: Insights from China”; and Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt and Jonsen, “Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis of research on multicultural work groups”. The issue concludes with two pieces from institutional and finance perspectives: Haxhi and van Ees, “Explaining diversity in the worldwide diffusion of codes of good governance”, and Cumming and Walz, “Private equity returns and disclosure around the world”. The issue offers a rich menu of contributions to IB research.

Rather than review the key insights of each of these papers, given the limited number of journal issues that remain within my editorial responsibility, I would like to use this letter to speak to the *JIBS* community of scholars about a subject that is “near and dear” to the vision my editors and I have had for the journal during our tenure: we have seen as one of our core missions the instillation of a strong Code of Ethics that guides the values and practices of *JIBS* authors, reviewers and editors.

## SCIENTISTS BEHAVING BADLY

The *Wall Street Journal* recently published a column, “New episodes of scientists behaving badly” (Felten, 2010), in which the author provides several recent examples of authors, editors and reviewers manipulating scientific journals: articles retracted after discovery of “irresponsible and dishonest” research that involved fabrication of scientific data, examples of corrupt peer review practices designed to sabotage academic competitors, and other misadventures. Things are much quieter on the “home front” at *JIBS*. At least to my knowledge, we have had no cases of authors fabricating data or reviewers sabotaging competitors. However, even at *JIBS*, we do have cases of scientists behaving badly.

### The *JIBS* Code of Ethics

When my editorial team and I began running *JIBS* in July 2007, one of the earliest policy documents we wrote was the *JIBS* Code of Ethics (see [http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs\\_ethics\\_code.html](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs_ethics_code.html)). Patterned after ethics codes adopted by the science and medical journals and organized into three sections (Authors, Reviewers and Editors), the code outlined the norms and practices that the *JIBS* Editors intended to follow during the reviewing process (see Box 1). Every author who submitted a manuscript to *JIBS*, for example, was asked to confirm that they had read and followed the *JIBS* Code of Ethics. It has been a point of pride for *JIBS* that our Code of Ethics, as far as we know, was the first ethics code written specifically for and adopted by any scholarly business journal.

Our reasoning behind creating the *JIBS* Code of Ethics was that journal ethics is a public good. We all benefit when authors keep high standards for themselves in their journal submissions. Reviewers can be confident that manuscripts are wholly original and have not appeared or will appear elsewhere, and that the novelty in the manuscript has been accurately portrayed by the author. Editors do not have to worry about originality or “slicing and dicing”. The costs of search, monitoring and enforcement are reduced for the editorial team. Authors do not suffer the loss of reputation (and other possible impacts such as denial of promotion or tenure) that can occur if they engage in major ethical violations that become public knowledge. A code of ethics thus can act as an *ex ante* dispute resolution mechanism, whereby authors are encouraged to behave ethically, reducing the number of ethical violations that need to be handled *ex post* by

### Box 1 Preamble to the *JIBS* Code of Ethics

The *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)* aspires to select and publish, through peer review, the highest quality research in international business. In order to achieve this goal, the entire peer review and publication process should be thorough, objective and fair. Journal reputation depends heavily on the trust by all stakeholders in the fairness of the peer review and publication process. A formal code of ethics, outlining guidelines for good behavior and proposing solutions to ethical dilemmas facing Authors, Editors and Reviewers, can build stakeholder trust and improve journal reputation. With this goal in mind, the *JIBS* Code of Ethics is designed to be a comprehensive policy for peer review and publication ethics in the *Journal of International Business Studies*. The Code describes *JIBS*'s policies for ensuring the ethical treatment of all participants in the peer review and publication process. *JIBS* Authors, Editors and Reviewers are encouraged to study these guidelines and address any questions or concerns to the *JIBS* Editor-in-Chief, Lorraine Eden, at [editor-in-chief@jibs.net](mailto:editor-in-chief@jibs.net). These guidelines apply to manuscripts submitted to *JIBS* starting 1 July 2007, and may be revised at any time by the Editor-in-Chief.

Source: [http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs\\_ethics\\_code.html](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs_ethics_code.html).

the journal editors, and reducing costs throughout the editorial review process. The real benefit is the public good of providing researchers with confidence in the reliability of the reviewing process, as illustrated in this quote from the fifth edition of the *CBE Style Manual* reproduced in Wilson (2002: 159):

Scientists build their concepts and theories with individual bricks of scientifically ascertained facts, found by themselves and their predecessors. Scientists can proceed with confidence only if they can assume that the previously reported facts on which their work is based are indeed correct. Thus all scientists have an unwritten contract with their contemporaries and those whose work will follow to provide observations honestly obtained, recorded, and published. This ethic is no more than science's application of the ancient Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It is an ethic that should govern everyone in the community of scientists when they serve as authors, editors, or manuscript referees.

### Examples

While the *JIBS* Code of Ethics formalized these norms into practical “dos and don'ts”, it was written without “teeth” in that the code did not outline what the punishments would be for violations. Each time an ethical dilemma occurred (for example, a case of plagiarism) the *JIBS* Editors dealt with the problem on a confidential, case-by-case basis.



Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, several ethical violations have come to light over the past 6–8 months, typically through the conscientious whistle-blowing activities of our reviewers. As a result, the *JIBS* Editors began to think about ways to strengthen and better disseminate the Code. Other journals and professional associations were clearly engaged in similar discussions (Kacmar, 2009; Schminke, 2009).

Perhaps some case examples would be helpful. One ethical problem that we have seen at *JIBS* recently is *redundancy* (“self-plagiarism”). In this case, an author submits a manuscript to *JIBS* where multiple paragraphs in the paper are identical to those in an existing published paper or a paper under review at another journal, written by the same author. In such cases, the *JIBS* Editors may differentiate between major and minor redundancy depending on the amount and content of the self-plagiarized material. For example, a single duplicate paragraph describing the research methods would probably be seen as minor redundancy and the authors asked to rephrase the duplicate sentences. However, multiple paragraphs would be considered major redundancy, leading to rejection of the manuscript.<sup>1</sup>

A second ethical problem that *JIBS* has faced is *failure to cross-reference*. In this situation, an author cuts up a research project into multiple small papers and does not clearly identify in each paper what exactly is new relative to other manuscripts by the same author. By failing to cross-reference the other manuscripts, the author misleads the reviewers and editor into believing that each manuscript is much more novel than it really is. In such cases, the author has not provided sufficient information for the editor and reviewers to make an informed judgment on a submission’s contribution.

I provide three specific examples of redundancy and/or failure to cross-reference at *JIBS*. First, a manuscript was under review at *JIBS* when a similar manuscript by the same author appeared in print in another journal. Comparison of the two manuscripts showed that the theory, primary data set and some hypotheses were identical in the two papers, so the originality of the *JIBS* submission was significantly reduced. Second, a manuscript was under review at *JIBS* and a similar manuscript by the same author was under review at another journal. An individual who happened to be asked to review both submissions identified significant overlap in the primary data set, hypotheses and

tables. Third, an author made minor revisions and resubmitted to *JIBS* an article that had been previously rejected after review at *JIBS*, requesting a different Area Editor and not informing the *JIBS* Office of the earlier rejection. The duplicate paper was discovered by a reviewer who had been invited to review the current and the earlier manuscript. (See Schminke (2009) for a similar example.)

In all three cases, the author withheld key information that would have led to rejection of the manuscript had that information been provided since all three papers violated the originality norms in the *JIBS* Code of Ethics. As a result, each manuscript looked as if it were making a greater contribution to the literature than it really was, once compared to the second manuscript.<sup>2</sup> As journal editors rely primarily or wholly on authors to disclose relevant information and are generally not in a position to verify authors’ statements, such withholding damages the peer review process since the probability of detection depends in many cases on serendipity or “sheer accident” (Schminke, 2009: 587–588).

A third ethical problem we have seen at *JIBS* is authors ignoring *conflicts of interest* (COIs), that is, “the abuse – actual, apparent or potential – of the trust that individuals have in professionals”. A COI is created when “financial or personal considerations have the potential to compromise or bias one’s professional judgment and objectivity” (Responsible Conduct of Research, 2010). A COI can be real, apparent (that is, where a reasonable person believes that the professional’s judgment is likely to be compromised) or potential (where a situation may develop into an actual COI).

COIs can be decomposed into two categories, financial and intangible, with the latter category including relational, political and religious conflicts (Roberts, 2009; Rockwell, 2007). While financial COIs are more common at medical journals (Blum, Freeman, Dart, & Cooper, 2009), relational conflicts have been more common at *JIBS*. Relational COIs include, for example, authors nominating as their recommended editor or reviewers individuals who are recent or current co-authors, colleagues in the same department, supervisor of their dissertation and so on (for more examples, see Rockwell, 2007). The motivation behind such nominations may be similar to “forum shopping”, that is, looking for a sympathetic forum (editor and/or reviewer) for the manuscript.

COIs are not, in and of themselves, considered misconduct in research, but they provide opportunities

for individuals to behave opportunistically. In addition, COIs – whether real, apparent or potential – reduce individuals' confidence in the reliability of professional organizations and their decision-making processes. COIs are particularly pernicious for scholarly journals because they can reduce the confidence that individuals have in research. Rockwell (2007: 6) argues that individuals should assess whether they have a potential COI that (1) would or could compromise their objectivity and judgment; or (2) would or could *appear* to do so and therefore would either compromise the value of the assessment, or might put their reputation at risk if the conflict were discovered afterwards and questioned. She offers two useful rules of thumb that we would also recommend at *JIBS*: when in doubt, discuss COIs with the editor and err on the side of caution.<sup>3</sup>

At *JIBS*, authors, reviewers and editors are required to disclose and avoid any actual, apparent or perceived COIs during the reviewing process. Regularly, however, I see authors nominating individuals who are not at arm's length from the author to be their editor or reviewer. Three recent examples include: nominating as a reviewer an individual who was a co-author on another manuscript; nominating as an editor one of the author's current co-authors; and nominating as a reviewer someone who was thanked in the acknowledgements for providing comments on the paper. In each of these cases, while the nominated individual most likely would have provided an independent and unbiased assessment of the manuscript, the appearance of unbiasedness and independence is lost due to the COI.

### Motivations

One can speculate as to motivations and circumstances that could lead scientists to behave badly. Transaction cost theorists will see this as rational behavior by individuals who are self-interest seeking with guile. In the presence of uncertainty and bounded rationality, authors have incentives to behave opportunistically, using "calculated efforts to mislead, distort, disguise, obfuscate or otherwise confuse" (Williamson, 1985: 47), particularly when the rewards are high.<sup>4</sup> Opportunistic behavior is not limited to authors, but it can also affect reviewers and editors. Miller (2006) provides a useful analysis of the "perils of peer review" that arise from biased judgments, overly harsh critiques or shirking behavior by reviewers. If the probabilities of detection and punishment are low, authors and

reviewers can make a rational benefit-cost calculation and behave opportunistically. Should they, in the rare instance, get caught, there is always the claim of "plausible deniability".<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, unfamiliarity with publication norms (e.g., in the case of PhD students and junior scholars) and differences in cultural norms across countries are rationales for behaving badly that do not involve self-interest seeking with guile. There are many potential minefields in the publication process that can trip up an unwary or unprepared author, reviewer or editor. Often, issues are not clear cut, and it is possible to make mistakes.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, while most journals and professional associations now have codes of ethics, as Kacmar (2009) argues, most scholars probably have not carefully studied these ethics codes and are likely to be unaware that their actions may be contravening stated policies.<sup>7</sup> As a result, senior scholars with junior co-authors are often likely to blame their junior co-authors for any ethical violations, using the grounds that the younger scholar did not know the rules. Note, however, that Schminke (2009: 588) in his discussions with 16 journal editors found that "most ethical violations do not appear to be cases of junior scholars not knowing or understanding the rules" nor caused by "junior scholars running ethical yellow lights because of pressures imposed by tenure time lines".

### Solutions

The solution both Schminke (2009) and Kacmar (2009) recommend is "know the code" and "disclose". These recommendations assume that individuals are not simply engaged in self-interest seeking behavior with guile. They may be boundedly reliable for a wide variety of reasons, that is, they do not respect basic ethics rules even in the absence of malevolence (Verbeke & Greidanus, 2009). In such cases, routines involving continuous education may be the best remedy, both in terms of efforts at disseminating an ethics code and in terms of encouraging disclosure.

In Fall 2009, the *JIBS* Editors decided to become more actively involved in implementing and enforcing the *JIBS* Code of Ethics, implementing a multi-pronged strategy for strengthening ethical standards and behaviors at the journal. Perhaps the most important decision was to join the Committee on Publication Ethics, COPE, <http://www.publicationethics.org>. COPE was founded 12 years ago by a group of medical journal editors concerned about publication misconduct (e.g., plagiarism,

redundancy, fraudulent data, unethical research, breaches of confidentiality). Many publishers, including Palgrave (our publisher), have signed all of their journals as COPE members. The *JIBS* Editors have now rewritten our Code of Ethics to link it more closely with the COPE Code of Conduct; an updated Code was posted on the *JIBS* website in February 2010.

When a problem is identified, *JIBS* is now following the general structure for handling ethical violations outlined in the COPE templates (see <http://publicationethics.org/flowcharts>). When the problems involve an author, he/she is informed that *JIBS* believes an ethical violation has occurred and is presented with the facts (for example, the plagiarized or redundant sections of the paper are highlighted and attached). The focus is on the facts, not the motive or motives behind the actions, and each situation is treated in confidence. Once the author has responded, and the facts have been ascertained, a final editorial decision is made and the file is closed. For a minor violation this might involve simply rewriting part of the paper; for a major violation, the manuscript would normally be rejected from further review at the journal.

We believe *ex ante* approaches are preferable, however, to the *ex post* identification of violations and related sanctions. The questions that authors complete when they submit a manuscript to *JIBS* have been tightened and clarified to ensure that the authors are aware of the ethical norms and practices at *JIBS*, and are less likely to just “check the box” without reading the statements. Reviewers and editors are also asked to consider and identify any potential COIs before taking on a manuscript. These mechanisms are designed to alert *JIBS* authors, editors and reviewers to potential code violations, with the hope of discouraging such behaviors *ex ante*.

Lastly, the *JIBS* Editors are actively engaged in an ethical-standards diffusion process to inform the *JIBS* community and wider IB community of scholars as to what we consider best ethical practices for scholarly research. We hope that, through a combination of preventative education and clearly outlined consequences of violations (credible threats), our editorial team can raise the standards of journal ethics at *JIBS*, with perhaps positive spillover impacts on other scholarly business journals and on the more macro-level functioning of the Academy of International Business itself.

We ask for your active engagement in this process. As Kacmar argues in her 2009 Letter from the Editors in the *Academy of Management Journal*: “it is equally important for each of us to *walk the walk* as well as *talk the talk* when it comes to ethical behavior” if we want to serve as ethical role models for our students and colleagues.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>There are some exceptions to this rule; for example, the author may receive permission in advance to publish the duplicate material elsewhere, such as a *JIBS* journal article later appearing as a book chapter. See the *JIBS* Code of Ethics for these exceptions.

<sup>2</sup>It should be mentioned that where an author fully cross-references another of his/her papers, this could enable a reviewer to identify the author, which would violate the *JIBS* double-blind review process. To comply with double-blind review, *JIBS* recommends that the author submit two versions of the manuscript to the journal: one for the editors and a second one for the reviewers. The reviewers’ copy should have identifying information removed when cross-referencing other manuscripts in the text and bibliography. Information on other relevant papers should also be provided to *JIBS* at the time of submission. The *JIBS* Manuscript Central Originality Questions provide space for an author to identify related manuscripts and upload them for review.

<sup>3</sup>For example, to avoid COIs, no AIB Board member can serve as Area or Consulting Editor at *JIBS* while on the AIB Board; as Editor-in-Chief, I have committed not to publish in *JIBS* during my tenure; and manuscripts submitted to *JIBS* by an Area Editor are not assigned to another Area Editor.

<sup>4</sup>For example, in addition to tenure and promotion motivations, some universities are now paying \$US 5000–10,000 to authors who have a paper accepted for publication in an A-level journal.

<sup>5</sup>As an example of plausible deniability, here is an author’s paraphrased response to the discovery by the *JIBS* Office that most of his/her submission was included in a paper under review elsewhere. “I believe that this situation is not a case that the *JIBS* Code of Ethics was trying to avoid. I now know I should pay extra attention as an author to avoid any problems in



advance. *JIBS* might want to recognize that this situation is not a clear violation of the code, as it originally might have looked”.

<sup>6</sup>Discussing possible situations and how they might be handled/avoided is a useful way to raise faculty awareness. For example, at the 2009 Academy of Management meetings, all of the participants in the doctoral consortia received some training on publication ethics. An All-Academy Symposium on Publication Ethics is in the planning stages for the 2010 Academy of Management meetings in Montreal.

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<sup>7</sup>Some professional associations still lack a code of ethics that outlines good governance practices, proscribes certain behaviors and establishes COI rules, for example, for selection processes and awards. The Academy of International Business, for example, does not have an ethics code as of February 2010. The Academy of Management, on the other hand, for some years has had a formal Code of Ethics, written policies to handle complaints of ethical violations and an ethics committee. See <http://www.aomonline.org>.