Editorial

The Journal of Applied Psychology publishes high quality research focusing on the application of psychology to better understand work and organizational phenomena. The journal published its first issue in March 1917 and will mark its first Centennial during the current editorial team’s term—an occasion we will celebrate with a Special Centennial Issue, tentatively planned to be published in 2017. Under the previous editorial team and Steve Kozlowski’s editorship, the journal has continued its upward trajectory in terms of enhancing scientific rigor and furthering scientific and applied impact. According to several indicators, such as number of published articles and pages, citations, and impact factors, the Journal of Applied Psychology has been—and continues to be—one of the leading and most influential journals in the fields of industrial and organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resources management. In addition, many authors worldwide chose to submit their best work to the journal. I sincerely thank Steve Kozlowski for his excellent leadership as editor of this journal, as well as for his generous mentorship and assistance during the transition.

My editorial team begun receiving and acting on new manuscripts as of January 1, 2014, and we are projected to receive close to 1,000 new manuscript submissions to the journal by end of this year. Thus, the journal involves a significant operation, with help from many dedicated individuals. I am very fortunate to work together with an outstanding and diverse team of 12 associate editors, who are leading experts across different substantive and methodological areas, including Talya Bauer, Portland State University; Christopher Berry, Indiana University; Paul Bliese, University of South Carolina; D. Scott DeRue, University of Michigan; Michelle Duffy, University of Minnesota; Lillian Eby, University of Georgia; Jill Ellingson, Ohio State University; Vicente Gonzalez-Roma, University of Valencia; Mark Griffin, University of Western Australia; Sabine Sonnentag, University of Mannheim; Michael Sturman, Cornell University; and Mo Wang, University of Florida. I am also grateful to have Jennifer Wood continuing to serve as manuscript coordinator after serving in this role for six years under Steve Kozlowski’s editorship. Finally, the editorial board of nearly 250 consulting editors, combined with over 600 ad hoc reviewers, is the foundation of the operation—with their diverse expertise these individuals play an integral role in our ability to publish high-quality research.

In this Editorial, I would like to share with you (a) the journal’s scope and mission, (b) expectations for different types of articles considered by the journal, and (c) the review process we use. Before drafting this editorial, I reflected on my personal experience with the journal—as an author, consulting editor, and then associate editor and now incoming editor. I have also formulated views and ideas expressed in this editorial based on discussions with the current associate editors, and previous editors and associate editors. The information below is also based on the editorial team’s consideration of current trends in the psychological and organizational sciences, as well as emerging changes in peer review processes within the social sciences.

Journal of Applied Psychology: Scope and Mission

The term applied psychology refers to many different subdisciplines of psychology, including clinical, school, educational, human factors, exercise, and industrial-organizational. However, in their forward for the very first issue of the Journal of Applied Psychology, Hall, Baird, and Geissler (1917) highlighted the need for publishing psychological research that explains applied phenomena “in the realm of business” (p. 5). In line with this, previous editors (e.g., Kozlowski, 2009; Zedeck, 2003) have noted that the Journal of Applied Psychology emphasizes the application of psychology within organizational and work settings. Keeping with this legacy the current editorial team will continue to publish original and rigorous investigations (empirical and theoretical) that enhance understanding of cognitive, motivational, affective, and behavioral psychological phenomena relevant to work and organizational settings, broadly defined. Although the journal has considerable breadth, the scope does not generally include applied cognitive, human factors or criminal justice topics (which are published in other American Psychological Association journals), or consumer behavior topics that emphasize consumers rather than service providers or the interface between service providers and consumers.

Despite some limits on its scope, the editorial team will continue previous editorial teams’ efforts to increase the breadth of topics published in the Journal of Applied Psychology. This is an important goal in light of ongoing changes in the nature of work, the workforce, and the broader context within which applied psychological phenomena occur in work and organizational settings. Indeed, people work across different contexts, such as in education, military, profit and nonprofit organizations, and in different countries and geographic regions. In addition, the workforce changes over time; for example, over the past several decades, there has been an increase in the number of women and older adults who work; an increase in dual career couples and therefore more frequent spillovers between work and nonwork experiences; and more work-related encounters between culturally diverse individuals (e.g., Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007; Butts, Casper, & Yang, 2013; Chen, Liu, & Portnoy, 2012). Furthermore, as a result of technological advances and societal changes, the nature and experience of work itself is shifting over time; for example, research on topics such as telecommuting or virtual team designs has increased in the past two decades as organizations are increasingly relying on such work practices (e.g., Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006; Kirkman, Gibson, & Kim, 2012). Such changes require that the journal continues to examine new work and organizational topics over time.

In addition, we will strive to further strengthen the extent to which the Journal of Applied Psychology serves as a bridge connecting the psychological sciences to applied work and organizational phenomena, and hence to the broader organizational sciences. In this role, the journal will continue its rich tradition of publishing a broad set of applied psychological topics with theo-
rtitical and practical relevance (e.g., organizational selection, training, and performance management; employee attitudes, well-being, and motivation; leadership, teams, climate, and culture). However, the editorial team also encourages more research that examines how developments in basic areas of psychology provide new insights to work and organizational phenomena. For example, we welcome research that uses developments from cognitive neuroscience to advance topics such as the study of leadership (e.g., Hannah, Balthazard, Waldman, Jennings, & Thatcher, 2013), as well as studies that rely on more basic social and cognitive psychological theories of implicit self-concept to advance our understanding of organizational justice and employee behaviors (e.g., Johnson & Lord, 2010). In addition, the journal also welcomes research examining the linkages between psychological phenomena and outcomes occurring at higher levels of analysis—including the organizational level. An example of such research includes a recent large-scale study by Kim and Ployhart (2014), who integrated psychological theories of employee capabilities with economics theories of recessions to examine the link between employee staffing and training and firm-level performance, prior to and following the Great Recession. Finally, we also aim to publish more research conducted in different parts of the world, given international research can enhance the literature both by introducing new concepts and phenomena relevant to work and organizational setting (e.g., the Chinese concept of Guanxi) and by testing the generalizability of theories and organizational practices across countries and cultural contexts (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007).

To match the diversity and complexity of phenomena that are of interest to the Journal of Applied Psychology, the editorial team will also remain open to different research approaches. We encourage any research that can advance our understanding of applied phenomena in work and organizational contexts through (a) basic and applied research; (b) empirical, theoretical, and review articles; (c) different methodological approaches (e.g., experimental and observational, quantitative and qualitative, deductive and inductive); (d) samples and data obtained in diverse settings, such as in different types of employment contexts, and in different cultures and countries; (e) multilevel data that cut across phenomena occurring at the individual, dyadic, team/group/family, and organization levels, as well as data within a person or unit over time; and (f) multidisciplinary approaches involving different sub-disciplines of psychology (e.g., cognitive, social) or social sciences (e.g., sociology, economics). Thus, to achieve its main mission, the Journal of Applied Psychology strives to be highly inclusive in terms of research topics, contexts, levels of analysis, and scientific approaches.

Expectations for Different Types of Journal of Applied Psychology Articles

The Journal of Applied Psychology publishes primarily rigorously conducted, original empirical research. Such research can include empirical studies in laboratory or field settings using experimental or observational designs with quantitative or qualitative methods, as well as meta-analyses. The journal is also open to publishing methodological articles that directly advance substantive research in work and organizational settings; otherwise, methodological articles may fit better in journals such as Psychological Methods (e.g., see Mathieu, Aguinis, Culpepper, & Chen, 2012; Hunter, Schmidt, & Le, 2006). In addition, following the publication of a Special Section on Theoretical Models and Conceptual Analyses (Klein & Zedeck, 2004), the journal continues to encourage theoretical submissions (e.g., Scott, Colquitt, & Paddock, 2009; van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004).

Regardless of approach, all articles published by the Journal of Applied Psychology are expected to contribute uniquely to the literature in meaningful ways. Contributions can be theoretical (e.g., generate new knowledge or otherwise meaningfully extend what we know about certain phenomena), practical (e.g., provide new guidance on an important applied problem or practice), empirical (e.g., extend external validity of a certain theory or phenomena), and/or methodological (e.g., identify new methods that directly advance the study of important substantive phenomena). We are open to different forms of contribution, so long as they advance further the understanding of important applied psychological phenomena relevant to work and organizational settings. Articles that contribute more broadly tend to be more successful in the review process and of course more impactful once published.

We also expect all articles to be scientifically rigorous. Broadly, scientific rigor encompasses high standards of—and consistency among—theory and hypothesis development, study design, measurement, analytical approaches, and evidence-based inferences (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991; Weick, 1995). We expect authors to clearly articulate the phenomena or topic they target, to clearly motivate and justify the intended contributions (e.g., by explaining how the article extends prior work, and why such extensions are important), and to ensure there is consistency between the intended contributions and the research approach. For empirical articles, we expect authors to provide sufficient and transparent information about sampling, study design and procedures, elicitation of constructs (i.e., measures or manipulations), and analyses and results, so that the reader can sufficiently understand what was done and found, and to support replication and extension of the results. With respect to methods and statistics, we accept both simple and sophisticated approaches so long as the approach fits the purpose of the article and supports valid inferences from the study.

In line with its inclusive mission, the Journal of Applied Psychology publishes different types of articles. Most common are feature articles and research reports. Feature articles are full-length articles that focus primarily on theoretically driven empirical and/or practical contributions or on theoretical contributions that can direct and energize additional research on the topic. Research reports are also original in their contributions, but they typically have a narrower scope than a feature article. The key difference between feature articles and research reports centers on the extent of the contribution, and commensurate with contribution—article length. Despite this difference, the two types of articles are reviewed using the same process. Although authors can indicate their preference for article type upon submission, typically the editorial team will determine whether an article fits better as a research report or feature article. The journal also encourages replication studies—particularly constructive replications that build on and provide useful extensions of prior findings (cf. Lykken, 1968). Constructive replications can be published either as research reports or feature articles, depending on the extent and scope of their contributions. Occasionally the Journal of Applied Psychology also publishes monographs. Monographs are articles judged by the
editorial team to have a wider influence and make more significant contributions to the field (e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Kim & Ployhart, 2014; Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010).

In the past few years, the Journal of Applied Psychology has also introduced two additional types of articles. First, the journal considers commentaries, intended to encourage additional academic dialogue and insights regarding important empirical findings and/or substantive topics published in the journal (see Kozlowski, 2011). Second, we now also encourage submissions for integrative conceptual reviews. These reviews are meant to integrate extant literatures and spur additional needed work in these literatures, by identifying potential gaps as well as areas for possible integration among different literatures. In doing so, such reviews ideally also broaden our theoretical understanding of the phenomena of interest. When submitting a manuscript, authors are encouraged to carefully read the instructions on the journal’s website regarding preparing the various types of articles for submission.

The Peer Review Process Employed by the Journal of Applied Psychology

The Journal of Applied Psychology strives to provide rigorous, fair, developmental, and timely review for all submitted manuscripts. One important change implemented by the previous editorial team involves new data transparency practices, which authors must now comply with when submitting manuscripts to the journal. Specifically, to reinforce American Psychological Association policies pertaining to Duplicate and Piecemeal Publication of Data (see Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed., pp. 13–15), the journal implemented a set of practices designed to help the editorial team determine whether submitted articles contain “original use” of data. These practices, which are explained in more detail on the journal’s website, are also meant to help authors communicate more transparently to the review team how current uses of data are unique relative to other (whether prior or concurrent) uses of the same data. These practices reinforce two core scientific values: (a) a transparent review process and (b) promotion of cumulative knowledge and insight to the literature. Being transparent about multiple uses of data can help meet professional ethical standards. Equally important, greater transparency can help ensure that published articles ultimately contribute new or unique knowledge to the literature (see Kirkman & Chen, 2011).

Once manuscripts are submitted to the Journal of Applied Psychology, the editorial team first scans the manuscript and decides whether the submission fits the journal’s mission and basic quality standards. Those deemed to be a poor fit with the journal’s scope or quality are sent back to the authors without full review (i.e., are desk-rejected), with a brief letter from either myself or one of the associate editors explaining the reason for desk rejection. Based on prior experience, we expect to desk-reject about 20% to 25% of all new submissions. Those submissions that fit the journal’s mission and meet basic quality standards are assigned to an action editor (me or an associate editor). The action editor assigns the manuscript to two reviewers, who are asked to provide reviews within 30 days. Reviewers provide qualitative feedback on the manuscript (which is transparent to the authors), as well as additional feedback to the action editor (which authors are not privy to) regarding likely contributions, publication recommendations, and whether the article may fit best as a feature article or research report.

Finally, based on an independent reading of the manuscript as well as feedback provided by the reviewers, the action editor makes and communicates the final decision to the authors. Action editors convey to authors either (a) reasons for why the manuscript was not invited to be revised (i.e., was rejected), or (b) if invited for revision, what authors need to do to further improve the manuscript. Our goal is to complete the review process within 60 days (and no later than 90 days)—from submission to decision. Authors invited to revise and resubmit typically are asked to do so within 90 days. To ultimately have an article accepted for publication, authors need to be responsive to the action editor and reviewers, but more importantly, authors must provide clear and convincing arguments in the manuscript itself regarding the article’s contributions, and outline critical theoretical and/or empirical aspects of the research.

In closing, I would like to again express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the previous Journal of Applied Psychology editor (Steve Kozlowski) and the previous editorial team for further enhancing the quality and prestige of the journal. In addition, I am sincerely grateful to the current associate editors, Jennifer Wood, and the journal’s reviewers for their tireless work on behalf of the journal. Last—but certainly not least—I also want to reinforce the important role authors play in shaping the journal’s content, quality, and impact. Although the editorial team has a process intended to attract and develop high quality and influential publications, the journal’s success and impact are driven by the quality of the articles that authors submit. Thus, I welcome authors worldwide to continue to submit their best work to the journal, and to help us advance the field further through the publication of new and innovative ideas and rigorously conducted empirical research with theoretical and applied relevance. As the Journal of Applied Psychology nears its Centennial, we wish not only to celebrate its enormous contributions and success, but also to work hard at ensuring the journal continues to thrive and impact the field for many more years to come.

References


