

# **History and Development of Management Communication Quarterly**

*by Matt Koschmann, University of Texas at Austin*

Management Communication Quarterly (MCQ) is often considered the closest thing we have to a flagship academic journal for the field of organizational communication. It offers an interdisciplinary environment for scholarship relating to management, communication, language studies, sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior. Historically, each issue features articles of primary research by top scholars, as well as a Forum/Dialog section that includes book reviews, commentaries on evolving issues in the field, research notes on developments and research in progress, and/or case studies of organizational communication issues.

According to the publisher (Sage), it is “the only journal you need to keep up with organizational communication research, theory, and practice.” This essay offers a brief history of MCQ, focusing on key developments throughout the years and perspectives from past editors.

## **In the Beginning**

MCQ began in 1987 as scholars from management and communication departments recognized the convergence of their fields and the need to develop theory and empirical research from an interdisciplinary approach. Paul Feingold from the Department of Business Communication at the University of Southern California was the first executive editor. He saw the need for a journal that fostered research, discussion and criticism regarding several communication areas that were relevant to the business school curriculum, such as management writing and speaking, and interpersonal, organizational, and corporate communication, all of which have a related focus on managerial and organizational effectiveness.

The first article in the first issue of MCQ was Linda Henderson’s (1987) study on the contextual nature of interpersonal communication in management theory and research. By her account, no previous studies had examined the integrated nature of interpersonal managerial communication within the context of the managerial work group. Her article, along with the inauguration of MCQ, served as an impetus to begin integrated and interdisciplinary research of management communication.

## **Organizational Shift**

Following a number of editors largely outside the field, Kathy Miller (then at Arizona State) was selected as the first editor from within organizational communication. One of her very first issues devoted space to exploring differences between organizational, corporate, business, and management communication—beginning to highlight what is unique to our field and what is shared with others. Such topics have resurfaced several times over the years in the pages of MCQ. Another

significant development with MCQ happened in 1996 under the editorship of Patrice Buzzanell of Northern Illinois University (now at Purdue). During this time the mission of MCQ changed to reflect an even stronger commitment to organizational communication, rather than management communication. Although only a slight change in wording, it signaled the journals “ownership” by the organizational communication community instead of the management-oriented professors who started the journal. Buzzanell explains that she went to several different conferences and academic gatherings to promote MCQ and its organizational focus. Her goal was to “publish the best in organizational, managerial, business, and corporate communication from a variety of theoretical perspectives and using different methods.”

The relationship between management and organizational communication scholars has sometimes been a source of tension with MCQ. When the journal first began, the acronym commonly used was McQ, with a lower case “c” for communication compared to the upper case “M” for management (not just on the cover, but also in the journal text). This was eventually changed to reflect a greater balance and enhanced role for communication. Although the current publication guidelines indicate “relevance to management” as one of the primary criteria, organizational communication scholars continue to pursue research above and beyond managerial concerns. Despite these changes, the journal title remained “Management” Communication Quarterly.

## **Going Pro**

Another significant development for MCQ took place when Ted Zorn was executive editor, 2000-2003. During this time MCQ was finally indexed in ProQuest, the online information service that provides global access to thousands of current periodicals and newspapers. This is one of the primary online databases that most universities subscribe to, so it made MCQ easily accessible to thousands of scholars and practitioners.

As Zorn noted, “That really raised the profile of the journal.” Previously it had not been included because ProQuest considered the journal too small and cited too infrequently. Other academic databases, such as EBSCOhost have followed suit; now scholars from all over the world and across numerous disciplines have access to the best scholarship in management and organizational communication at their fingertips. Online access only goes back to 1999, but it still marks important progress for the prestige and development of MCQ.

## **To the Ends of the Earth**

A final development worth noting is the increased international contribution within MCQ. The subtitle of MCQ has always been “An International Journal,” but this aspect has not always been emphasized within its pages. One of the main reasons is that managerial and organizational research have been dominated by American scholars

throughout the past decades. That is starting to change, however, and MCQ is helping to foster that change by encouraging international scholarship. This began by appointing an executive editor outside the United States: Ted Zorn from Waikato University in New Zealand. As he noted in the introduction of the first article he edited, "I will work to make the journal truly international, as its (full) name suggests" (Zorn, 2000, p. 6). His first Forum was devoted to international perspectives on organizational communication, and he worked hard to encourage more international involvement. For example, Zorn tried to invite one non-U.S. scholar for each Forum and invited non-U.S. scholars to do one-time reviews.

This international focus continued under Charley Conrad (Texas A&M), the next executive editor after Zorn. Forty percent of Conrad's editorial board was from outside the U.S. and he edited the first issue in which all the articles were authored by non-U.S. scholars. But this also revealed a great challenge. As Conrad explains, "Once you move outside of the U.S.-U.K. Commonwealth axis, scholars conceive of academic research in very different terms." Many scholars from the international community simply have different starting assumptions and conceptualizations of the field of organizational communication than do American and British researchers.

### **Promising Future**

MCQ will clearly continue to expand its international focus under new editor Jim Barker. Formerly at the Air Force Academy, Barker now resides at Waikato University in New Zealand with former editor Ted Zorn. A current look at the MCQ website (<http://mcq.sagepub.com/>) reveals the expanded international emphasis in Barker's new editorial board. Although organizational communication scholars anxiously await his first issue, it seems clear that MCQ will continue to be the primary academic journal for organizational and management communication scholarship in the U.S. and throughout the world.

### **References**

- Henderson, L. S. (1987). The contextual nature of interpersonal communication in management theory and research. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1(1), 7-31.
- Zorn, T. (2000). Letter from the editor. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14(1), 5-7.