

Interview with Professor Masaaki Kotabe, Editor of Journal of International Management during AIB 2005 conference July 9-11, 2005

Professor Hoshino: Today we have Professor Kotabe from Temple University. He is editor of the Journal of International Management and according to this sample copy that I just borrowed from the office, I will return it later, in this journal you are the editor and you have also one managing editor Kimberly A. Cahill, so how do you organize the editing job?

Professor Kotabe: Well, first of all I am the editor, and the managing editor, Kimberly A. Cahill, is a she. She basically handles the manuscript submission. We manage the journal all electronically, so the papers are submitted electronically mostly by email, and she receives them and she will, whenever she receives a manuscript, she will send it to me, again electronically, and I will assign three reviewers to have the paper reviewed and I send the list of those names and addresses back to her and she will send a review request letter to these three reviewers and that is how it goes. And then, once she receives all the reviews back, I will receive the actual review comments from those reviewers and I will read them and make my own editorial decision. So she handles the actual task of receiving all submissions and sending that manuscript to me and communication with the actual reviewers. So I don't really communicate directly with the reviewers.

Professor Hoshino: So you pick up 3 referees for each manuscript, from this editorial board which has 64 members?

Professor Kotabe: Editorial board members, this is just my way of assigning reviewers. The first reviewer is from the editorial board, the second reviewer is not from the editorial board we call that person, external reviewer or ad hoc reviewer or temporary reviewer and that person has to be very knowledgeable about the subject of the paper. And the third reviewer is another one from outside the editorial board who may not be a specialist in that particular area but in a related area, so that he or

she can provide a general review, you know. I am a firm believer that if you cannot convince ordinary people about what you want to say, the paper is not good. So I will rely on an editorial board member, who has a high level of skill, established skill, and a second reviewer a specific knowledge on that manuscript and a third one, who may have some understanding all I want to know is whether she or he is going to like it. So generally that is the format that I use in allocating reviewers.

Professor Hoshino: So usually, from my experience, I pick up two reviewers from the editorial board or a related area. But in your case you pick up a third reviewer, who is not a specialist. So how do you select the third reviewer?

Professor Kotabe: As I said, given my profession, I know quite a few people I can easily identify two or three hundred people, and I can identify who is a real specialist, and I can identify who is not a specialist but kind of interested in that topic. So even when I write my own article, I ask my wife if she likes my paper. She is not a specialist but she gives me a good sense. If she says it's a crappy paper then it has to be crappy, but if she says, kind of interesting then So I really appreciate that kind of input from general public, so to represent the general public I would try to identify a reviewer who may have interest though who may have not specific skills on methodological analysis in or reviewing a paper. So basically to capture the wide aspect of the reviewer.

Professor Hoshino: And there are 64 members of the editorial board, how did you select those members?

Professor Kotabe: They have to be, how should I say, there are no single criteria, there are several. One is some of them are so called senior well-known academics who have tremendous record of publications. So they have proven they are great researchers. And also I try to bring in relatively young energetic people. They are the ones willing to review the papers. Just reviewing a paper is very time consuming, particularly for older faculty members, who may be able to review papers but they are not getting anything in return, there is no financial incentive. The junior faculty members, I mean the

researchers, are interested in reviewing papers to understand what kind of papers are written today. So even if there is no financial reward there is a hidden reward to those reviewers. So I think those are just the two criteria that I use. And as we all know, people look at the members on the editorial board and if they are well recognized people, so they say this journal might be good. So there is some marketing aspect, too, in reality. But again if we can not rely on the marketing aspect, I mean the name values of those people because the editorial board members have to do the actual reading. So those are the two major criteria that I use.

Professor Hoshino: Can I ask about the acceptance ratio of your journal?

Professor Kotabe: In the last two years about 12%.

Professor Hoshino: 12%

Professor Kotabe: 88% rejection.

Professor Hoshino: And how long does it take usually?

Professor Kotabe: We take, the review process is much better than the JIBS, JIBS editor Arie Y. Lewin would not admit it but their review process takes 6 months to one year. We on average have a turn around period from submission to review and then we will be sending comments back to author, that turn around period is only 41 days on average, so probably we set the shortest average review period. Then people started recognizing the effort we have been making. And it's probably the best editorial process among the international journals.

Professor Hoshino: That's very short. That's a big advantage.

Professor Kotabe: So let me refer to the management of submission. Kim receives the manuscript and immediately she will send me the manuscript, and then my running time for assigning the actual reviewers is on average usually within one day, and worst case scenario two days so within 48 hours she will receive the list of reviewers and immediately she will send those reviewers an electronic file about the manuscript so within two

days reviewers could start reviewing. And we give those reviewers a month, 30 days to review, and Kim, well if we have not received the actual reviewing in three weeks then she will automatically send a reminder. And then she always, every thing is done using emails, so she always Cc a copy to me, when she sends an email reminder to the reviewers and with a Cc to me I receive the same email from Kim. And then as the editor, I have a certain level of power in this profession; I will send that reviewer a further reminder. So kind of pushing the reviewer to review it quickly. Usually when I send another email to the actual reviewers, they will respond very quickly within one week. So that way we can pretty much receive all the reviews back within one month period. But again there are some exceptions, and that's why on average, we did the computation, and on average it takes 41 days to get the whole review process turning around.

Professor Hoshino: Supposed the reviewer doesn't respond.

Professor Kotabe: It happens unfortunately more often because they are not getting paid to do the review. If that is the case at least, historically speaking, I will have received two reviews in 40 days, and I will base my decision on those two reviewers instead of waiting. My role is to expedite the reviewing process and that's the reason of having three reviewers' comments. Now if those two reviewers' comments are completely split negative to positive, and there is no promise that we will be getting the third review in time, in that case I probably review the paper by myself. And then I double my self as a third or fourth reviewer and I make the final decision.

So let's say 30% of my work time is devoted to managing the journal.

Professor Hoshino: 30% so that means you don't teach many courses?

Professor Kotabe: I do teach, I teach one class for two and a half hours once a week on Friday. so basically I am free from Monday to Thursday and Saturday and Sunday. And Kim once in a while works on weekends, but everything is handled electronically. So I could

receive from Kim, paper submission on weekends, and my computer is always on. I have 5 computers in different places so in every place, I have two offices and I have two houses so at least I have four computers and they are always on so where ever I have to be at least I know if I received a paper from Kim. And that's why even on weekends they are on usually 24 hours.

Professor Hoshino: But this time you said you might go to Osaka, at that time how do you do?

Professor Kotabe: My laptop is now on, in my hotel room. So I processed, in fact, one paper yesterday. I travel about 3 months out of the country and yet I can manage the process. It's a lot of work; it's an investment of my time in the journal. And the journal is fairly new. You know this profession, in the international business area JIBS has been around and we call it an A journal, and every thing else, our journal and other journals are considered to be below JIBS. So I see my role as an editor as if I were an executive in charge of a new product. This is Honda 15 years ago, and probably JIBS is Toyota. So how can I outperform Toyota with a new car. Well we have to have a specific advantages and one advantage that we have is the quick turn around period and actually the review process. Well the rejection rate is 88%, I mean the acceptance ratio is 12%, and I read all the manuscripts and I will reject at my desk about 27% of all the manuscripts that come in. And then we send the remaining 73% to the actual reviewers. And then eventually only 12% will be accepted. I would say, on average a lot of papers go through two revisions. Submission, first revision, second revision, and once in a while a third revision. So it takes 9 months to a year if the paper is to be published.

Professor Hoshino: You publish your journal in affiliation with the Institute of Global Management Studies of Temple University. That means that Temple University is sponsoring the journal?

Professor Kotabe: This journal was originally managed by another person and unfortunately he didn't do a good job. So the publisher wanted to find another editor, and one year before I joined the Temple University, the new dean at Temple University decided to bring in the journal

to the university. Now the arrangement is Elsevier, publisher of this journal owns the publication, the name and everything. Actually the university decided to allocate a certain room, we call it a storage space, for the journal where we can manage it internally. For which we receive editorial fee and royalty for the subscription. Nowadays we don't read typical journals, we read articles electronically. Since I took over 3 years ago, actually 2 and half years ago the number of downloads has quadrupled, four times, I have statistics. I think the total number of downloads in the lab here was about 75000, which is fairly good. And actually, we set the standards for Elsevier publications, according to Elsevier.

Professor Hoshino: From my doctoral student Hassan, are there any questions?

Hamid Hassan: As you were discussing the reviewing process, the time when the paper comes to you until the time is accepted. So generally in all the journals it takes a long time. When the paper comes to the editor and when it is accepted. Do you think this long time is fairly ok, because of the time consuming nature of reviewing process, or you have some suggestion that this time can, or in future some improvements can be made to decrease this time?

Professor Kotabe: I mean you are talking about for other journals?

Hamid Hassan: I am talking about, I mean it takes a long time when the paper comes to the editor and when it is accepted. Generally it is 6 months even more than 6 months. So do you have some suggestions to improve and reduce this time level?

Professor Kotabe: The problem is, I mean a fundamental issue here, and we have a review process. somebody, actually 3 people have to read the manuscript, make the comments and send those comments to me and as an editor all I can do is shorten the turn around time, but actually the review process is pretty much up to the actual reviewers even though we encourage them to turn it around in one month. So that's probably the shortest that can be. You can't ask them, the actual reviewer to

read the paper in one day, it is impossible, we are all busy bodies. Now if you go outside management and marketing, you know typical international business journals, practically finance journals, authors have to pay, like 500 dollars to submit a paper. And also the reviewers get paid, so that will definitely encourage reviewers, that's a financial incentive. But for the majority of journals like ours there is no financial incentive. It is just more or less an obligation

Hamid Hassan: That's what I was trying to ask.

Professor Kotabe: Just pressure from me and that's the only way. And that's why; I don't mean to criticize the Journal of International Business Studies. They used to have a very reasonable turn around period, two editors ago, and the previous editor kind of screwed it up, and then the current editor is equally problematic. So that's why the actual review process for JIBS takes 6 at least months to a year, and then once you revise it, then it takes another 6 month to a year. From the authors point of view, it takes time to revise it, and given all the volume of the comments you receive, yes it could take three or four years, if you look at the time from submission to the actual publication. And even after the paper was accepted, then you have to wait to see when your paper will actually get printed out. And that waiting time could be from 6 months to 9 months. So what I tell my PhD students is, once you read the brand new article, the most recent article, it's about 3, 4, 5 years old. Don't ever think it's new, not an old article but basically the thinking is 3 or 4 or 5 years old.

Professor Hoshino: Are there any other questions?

Some one from the audience: I think competition is growing very much among journals actually, so do you have any specific target of an area for your journal?

Professor Kotabe: Well international business is a broad area. There are some specialized journals like the Journal of International Marketing which is specialized in marketing. My journal is a journal of international management, with the focus on management. JIBS, Journal of International Business Studies can be anything. But other generic journals such as Strategic

Management Journal you can send an international article but again it has to be strategy related. So in that sense I don't think all the journals are competing for the same thing. As you know, in general the older the journals the better recognized they are.

So if you look at the Academy of Management Journal, the Academy of Management Review, I think they are top journals. And in international business it used to be Columbia Journal of World Business but that is gone now, it was displaced by the Journal of International Business Studies. It was founded in 1973 so they have 40 years of publication history, so they get an automatic "A" in the top quality status. And I think it is a good journal, but it doesn't mean it is the only journal to be around. I think because there are so many good papers that get rejected by top journal. But getting rejected does not necessarily mean those papers are bad. Getting a rejection or an acceptance is, to a large extent, a function of who the reviewers are. If you are lucky enough to have a reviewer to like your kind of work then the probability of getting accepted will increase. But if the reviewer who hates that kind of work is assigned to read your paper, actually they will try to reject your paper. It's not actually 100% scientific, you know it's a problem. So my point is, a good paper may get rejected in top journals and so journals like mine, I know we can not get the first submissions, authors probably want to submit their papers to JIBS first, if they get rejected, they might send it to us or other journals. And this being realistic, that's how academic competition takes place. So my role is to try to identify a good manuscript that could be as good as anything else and yet unfortunately was rejected. And then this is when the role of the editor comes to play. There are two kinds of editors. Editors who just process them, and that's not good. And also editors who try to help authors to build their papers with the help of reviewers. And I have been playing that role, so I have been helping them. But I have to make sure those papers are promising, and that's where my knowledge, my good feel comes to play. The reason why we have an increase of downloads, 4 times in the last two and a half years, is that actually the reflection of the effort that I and Kim have been making.

Professor Hoshino: So if you want to publish your own paper in this journal, how will you do?

Professor Kotabe: I won't do it.

Professor Hoshino: Ah, you don't publish in your journal.

Professor Kotabe: I once did but again at that time I asked somebody else to play my role, as a temporary editor. But I don't do it. For example with JIBS, when it was housed at the University of South Carolina they were publishing their own papers. I just don't like it. I like fairer systems. One of the ways to show that we are fair is not to publish my own work in the journal. So you don't see my papers in JIM.

Professor Hoshino: So where do you want to publish your papers?

Professor Kotabe: I send my papers to the Journal of Marketing, Strategic Management Journal and JIBS. I have about 15 JIBS publications, so I published quite a few, so I know their review process and how it changed.

Professor Hoshino: Are there any articles which have weighting of these journals or sometimes I heard some journals have an evaluation for professors, did you see these papers?

Professor Kotabe: Your question is how journals are ranked?

Professor Hoshino: Yes.

Professor Kotabe: That's what we call "A" journal, "A-" Journal, "B" journal and so on. But new journals are all considered less than "A". And our journal, the Journal of International Management, was not even considered a valuable journal. And since our dean took over this journal 7 years ago, and I was hired 6 years ago and I became editor almost 3 years ago. If you look at the time table, the recognition that people give to this journal has gone up. I think the other way to see it, is again, I talked about the actual increase of downloads. I mean 7 years ago it was too small but now about 75000 downloads in one year. And how many articles do we have, let's say 7 articles per issue times 4, so we have less than 30 articles, and we have 75000 downloads. You can see how frequently those papers are getting downloaded. I think

our journal has become a sort of A minus, B plus journal, a step down from JIBS. And I was at the Meet the Editor session for the doctoral students and junior faculty members. People generally think that JIBS is the best journal, and a lot of people think that our journal is up and coming. In other words we have reached JIBS quality but not yet the JIBS reputation. And of course all professors evaluated it in any school that is using the North American evaluation model, and the ranking of the journals varies from school to school. In some schools even JIBS doesn't count. Such as, the University of Wisconsin, they have management, I don't think they would consider JIBS as A journal they accept it as a B journal. But if you go to my previous employer the University of Texas at Austin, they consider it an A journal if and only if you have published in other functional A journals. So if you just keep publishing in JIBS, then generally they would not consider your JIBS publication as an A journal because you have not proven that you can publish in Journal of Marketing or the Strategic Management Journal. So that is probably more realistic, and the reason why it happened that way is because the business schools are made up of functional departments. So naturally if you are a marketing researcher, the marketing researchers prefer their own marketing journals. But JIBS is in between it is not a marketing journal, it is not a management journal, and it's not finance. So there is a hidden variable against the International Business Journal because it is not their functional, and that's why in many schools, you know Texas at Austin is a typical example, JIBS is considered as an "A" as long as you can publish in the 3 main "A" journals. So that's the general ranking. And I don't think we give a numerical score to journals we just categorize them as A journals, B journals and how many publications do you need for promotion of course it varies from school to school.

Professor Hoshino: I want to ask you about the ranking of the universities and ranking of each professor if there are.

Professor Kotabe: There are. Some people published those papers. The ranking of the universities in international business, and the ranking of people in international business. So basically what those people

have done is to look at the publications, actual publication with the category of A journal, B journals. For most people I don't think they rank the journal they would identify let's say four, five, six "A B" journals and then look at who published how many times and where those authors are affiliated. Yes, some people have published those papers, and of course I have been ranked in a number of journals in a certain way. I don't have to talk about this. If you want to find them you can.

Professor Hoshino: Ok Thank you very much professor Kotabe.

Professor Kotabe: Well, thank you very much. Doumo Arigatou Gozaimasita.

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Dr. Kotabe has written over 100 scholarly articles and over a dozen books. His research work has appeared in such journals as the *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Strategic Management*, and *Academy of Management Journal*. His books include *Global Sourcing Strategy: R&D, Manufacturing, Marketing Interfaces* (1992), *Japanese Distribution System* (with Michael R. Czinkota, 1993), *Anticompetitive Practices in Japan* (with Kent W. Wheeler, 1996), *MERCOSUR and Beyond* (1997), *Trends in International Business: Critical Perspectives* (with Michael R. Czinkota, 1998), *Market Revolution in Latin America: Beyond Mexico* (with Ricardo Leal, 2001),

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He serves/has served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Marketing*, the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the *Journal of International Marketing*, the *Journal of World Business*, the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Advances in International Management*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Latin American Economic Abstracts*, and the *Thunderbird International Business Review*, among others. He also serves as an Advisor to the Institute of Industrial Policy Studies (IPS) *National Competitiveness Report*.

In 1998, he was elected a Fellow of the Academy of International Business for his significant contribution to international business research and education. He is the recipient of the 2002 Musser Award for Excellence in Research at Temple University.