

# What next for e-O&P?

## An insider account of change at the AMED journal 2009-2020

David McAra



### Begin!

"David! I love hearing you speak."

(Was that what he said? It was something like that, I think. What did he mean? How was I speaking?)

"Why don't you write down what you do?" John continued. "Write an article for the journal. Doesn't matter how long it is."

We'd been discussing our long running and so far, fruitless search for fresh talent to reinvigorate e-O&P and make sure it doesn't fade away as Bob and I run out of steam. (No sign of Bob running out yet but I am and he's a few years older than me.)

That was John Sweet, co-editor of this Autumn/Winter 2020 edition of e-O&P. He was responding to my candid expression of frustration about the drafting of our advertisement (and cry for help). After several iterations it had more than doubled in length and (in my opinion) lost a lot of the emotive appeal I was trying for.

That's how it started, this personal account of my part in the evolution of this organ of the spirit of AMED. Through occasional challenges and frustrations over the past decade, I have loved it and I hope some readers may find seeds of encouragement and possibility here and come forward with energy and ideas to infuse the journal - and AMED - with new life.

My account also includes some of the nitty gritty about my part in putting an edition together. I get a bit technical in places because learning how to cope with the technicalities has been a large part of the fun for me. But we are not at all wedded to our present way of working. You may be astonished by our clunky old systems. Their replacement is long overdue. Our enduring concern is to give voice to the spirit of AMED.

What is this spirit, I hear you ask? You'd better ask around. For me, it's a shared belief in the importance of [ethics and values](#) in a world of work from which such considerations can so easily be set aside.

## Context

[Bob and I have been working together on e-O&P since 2009](#) when we created the second edition. The first e-O&P was also the last O&P, the elegant, quarterly journal published for AMED by Gower. Some material had been gathered for the next edition (November 2008?) but we couldn't afford to print or post it, so we published it on our website.

During the 1990s, companies like Shell, where I worked for three years, decided that learning and development were no longer part of their 'core business'. As many large, in-house departments shrank and vanished, AMED suffered a collapse in membership and only survived thanks to some heroic work by a small group of salvagers. Oh yes! And this all came to a head in 2008/9, at the time of the global banking crisis. Even so, significant debts were paid off, overheads trimmed, administration streamlined and the spirit of AMED lived on, embodied to a considerable extent in e-O&P.

## The Editorial Board

Bob, as commissioning editor, does the lion's share of the work on content. That's Dr Bob MacKenzie, former Professor of Management Learning with the International Management Centres' Business School and now Visiting Professor at the University of Chichester. He comes up with themes, entices authors and coaxes them through multiple drafts, keeps other stakeholders aligned (including me) and generally pilots each edition safely into harbour. My task has been putting articles into our house style, compiling the final edition with a cover, contents table and tailpieces and posting it on the website.

Our complementary roles have developed quite naturally over the years along with our relationship. With our different styles of writing and of working, we occasionally strike sparks. Once or twice, I may have given vent to intemperate expressions of frustration over unwarranted (in my opinion) inflation of the word count but I was (am) always met with patience and tact and we work through to solutions, more creative and satisfying for us both. Here is the essence of Critical Friendship.

We call ourselves the Editorial Board. (It's the best line in my CV! ☺)

We still publish up to four editions per year. You may notice we switched to seasonal titles in 2011 to allow ourselves more forgiving deadlines and occasionally combined seasons. These flexible and adaptable ways of working have enabled us to operate on a shoestring for twelve years.

## Taming the documents

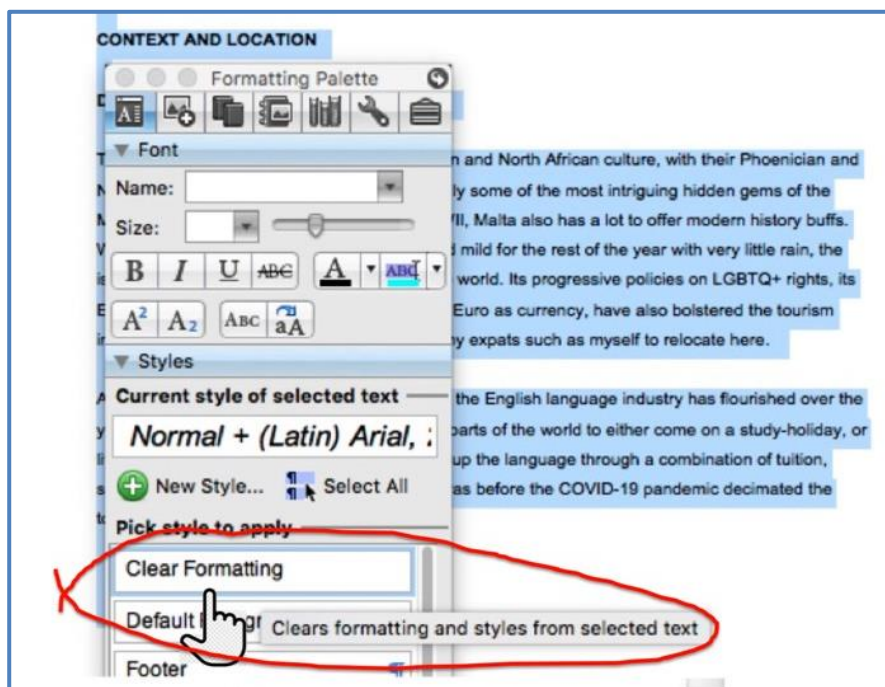
At first, I copied the printed format until readers pointed out that the two-column layout didn't lend itself to online reading. Belina Raffey (then Council chair) led us through a rebranding process (she didn't like the echoes of the Japanese throwing star in our old logo!) and created a new website. Alison Terry, Bob's co-editor on the Autumn 2010 edition, suggested a scheme of colours, fonts and heading styles which I have been following ever since.



The two-column format of the printed journal and the old 'Japanese throwing star'.

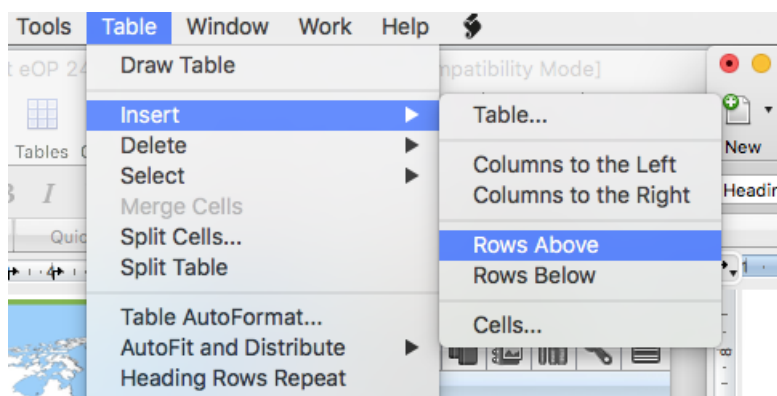
Bob is often several months into the process when he starts to send me 'final drafts', created in various versions of Microsoft Word. For all its standardised convenience, Word is a tricky medium and can present documents quite differently on different systems. As it travels from user to user, the text seems to acquire invisible code that can mess up the layout in ways that are hard to discover and undo.

So I start by creating a text only version of the final draft, stripping out all the images and tables, all the formatting and all the extra line spaces. Then I paste all this clean text into a template and go through, page by page using 'styles' to set the various blocks of text, with fonts, headings and subheadings, spacing, indents and bullet points.



## Easy on the eye

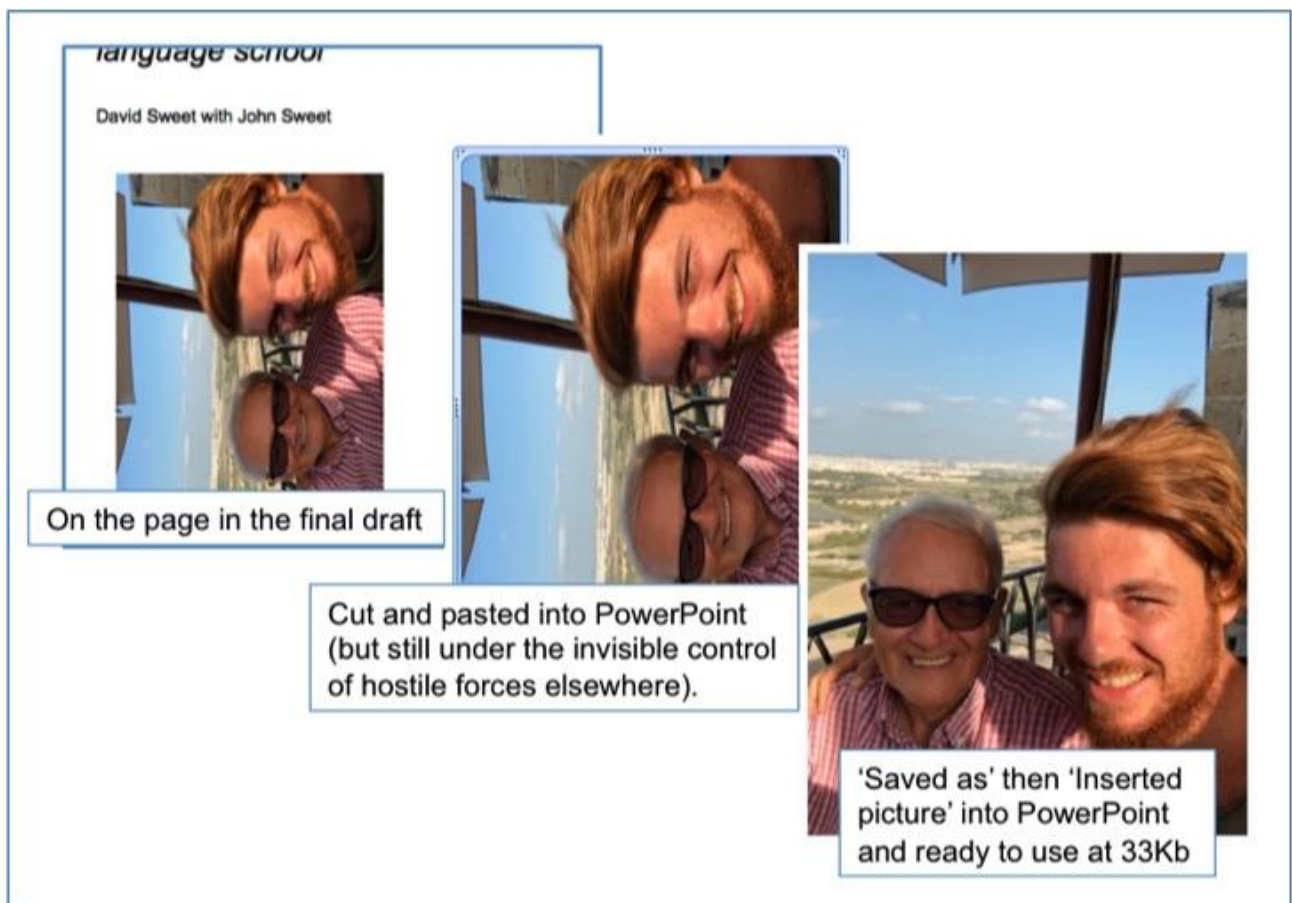
We are always glad to have colourful pictures breaking up the text but they also represent a challenge, tending to jump about on the page or even between pages. It was Ned Seabrook who tipped me off that using 'tables' was the answer. So my template starts as a table with one column and one row. I work through, adding rows to let me choose where a new page starts and where a picture appears. Sometimes I split a row into two columns where an image or table needs less than the full width.



As I go through the author's final draft, removing the images, I paste them onto a PowerPoint slide. Then, from the PowerPoint, I 'save as' a jpeg into my 'Pictures' folder with the author's name and a sequence number. Some authors use professional photos. I have received files up to 30Mb. Others send tiny, pixelated thumbnails. This process makes sure all the images are of a similar size and ready for inserting into the formatted article as I work through. If there is a particular arrangement of images together, I can lay them out on my PowerPoint and make a screen grab. Then all the relative positioning is fixed and I only have one image to place.

## Copyright issues

I must also pay attention to the pictures for copyright implications. We've had a couple of upsets over the years so I am wary. In his article for this edition, John is using his own photos so there is no uncertainty about ownership. But he has included a map which is clearly labelled as Copyright. I wonder if he has permission? It's identified in the references as a royalty free image but that doesn't always mean it's free to use. Some authors subscribe to picture services and have their own permission but I feel safer with Creative Commons licences and we encourage authors to look for pictures in [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/) where the ownership is specified. Microsoft often sets intriguing puzzles. In the final draft from John, the photo appeared rotated and stretched. Pasted into the slide it appears with a blue frame around it. This means I haven't separated it from the Word document. Back in the original, I try the right click again, save as picture and then back to PowerPoint, insert picture from file and it's fine.



Sometimes I crop and resize pictures so they fit better or shift their position with respect to the text to help with page lengths. I like starting a new page with a new paragraph if I can, without leaving too much space at the end of the page before. I try to remember to check whether the exact position seems to matter. (“See above/below.”)

### Converging on a final, final, (final) version

Some of our academic authors like to use footnotes. These can also play havoc with page breaks, so we try to discourage them. The trouble is, footnotes appear outside the table, at the bottom of the page they are referenced to and follow their own rules, resisting any efforts to tame them. Endnotes are particularly tricky because they reorganise themselves to the very end of the whole edition when I gather all the articles into a single document. (Some authors like to have both in the same article!)

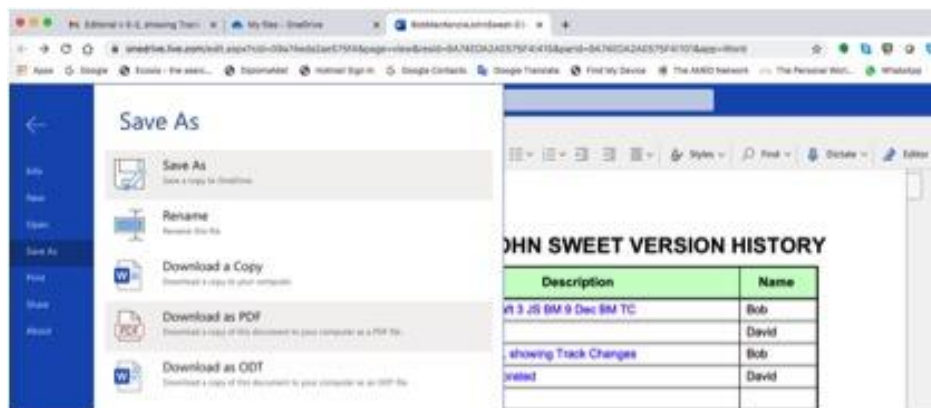
Sometimes, as publication deadline approaches, I start work on articles before they are quite finished. This is always a mistake. Because of the instabilities of Word, the first cut and paste is the only time I import the author’s text in a single move. After that, receiving a significantly amended version means a lot of extra work. I can use Word’s ‘compare documents’ process to see what has changed but it is slow and cumbersome. Even if ‘track changes’ has been used, I transfer the updates manually, one by one, into my own, quarantined version. When a space has been inserted or removed or a comma replaced with a semi-colon, it’s hard to spot and can take ages.



As I complete the formatting, I save the article in ‘portable document format’ (PDF) so we can see how it will

look in the final publication. I post it in an editorial group on the web site, along with the Word version which the author can mark up and send back to me.

I work on an elderly Macintosh which allows me to save from Word into PDF but unfortunately, when I do that, the hyperlinks stop working. My daughter's cast-off HP laptop kept me going for a couple of years until it needed upgrades but fortunately, I discovered [Word Online](#) which handles our needs satisfactorily. It compresses documents rather well, which is handy as our website will only take files up to 5Mb.



## Finishing touches

One of the aspects I like about this work is that it does eventually end and I find relatively few tasks in life of which this is true. It's a low adrenaline computer game and I work away quite happily as authors come back with refinements and typos and other errors. ("Page 10 seems to be completely blank." "I wonder if that has anything to do with the three lines of text you inserted on page 9," I chunter to myself.) Mind you, I do a lot of cutting and pasting and have been known to lose whole paragraphs.

After two or three iterations with the author and the editors I have a final, formatted version which can be pasted into my 'Whole Journal' template. I have learned to insert a 'Section break' between articles and to be careful that page breaks don't fall beyond the start of the footer. Word doesn't mind but the PDF will have a blank page.

Designing the cover is usually a fun, collective process and there are some standard pages at the front and back: 'How to get involved', 'Coming soon ... !'etc. Dressing up the contents table is always the very last thing. Word will update the table itself automatically with titles and page numbers as the articles are added but it discards any formatting or additional text. There's also a bit of a fuff to get the hyperlinks working between the contents table and the articles but we haven't time to go into that. My deadline is pressing.

## Is it worth it?

I'm not sure how I sound, going on about the spirit of AMED but it has been and remains special to me. I entered the world of work with a whole set of invalid assumptions about people and organisations. Management by Objectives sounded quite sensible, as did payment by results and annual appraisal was obviously essential.

It didn't take so long before the shortcomings of my simplistic worldview started to become apparent. On the other hand, it was much longer before I found in AMED a community of people who lived contentedly with

uncertainty and complexity and the value of constant inquiry and listening. It's not the only community where such people can be found but it does have a very particular DNA and it is wonderful to work with.

By strange coincidence, just as I was wrapping up, I stumbled on the [article I wrote for the 2009 edition](#) of e-O&P. I am sobered to find myself saying more or less the same things in the same words. Here is my eleven-year-old account (McAra, 2009) of "the genes in the AMED DNA:

- An absence of trite, predetermined learning outcomes,
- A tolerance of, no, an appetite for ambiguity and a certain amount of chaos,
- Spontaneous outbreaks of leadership
- Mutual respect without deference to position
- A thirst for diversity and new ways of seeing."

So YES! It's worth it. There is so much transformation work to do in organisations and you owe it to yourself to get involved. People only join AMED because they want to. There is no extrinsic motivation – no accreditation or status. No wait ... there is! I forgot the cheap indemnity insurance for independent consultants! But if that encourages them to join, it isn't why they stay. They stay because they meet respectful, honest, interesting people who ask wonderful questions and listen.

This is not a dusty old journal bound to tradition. It is relevant, has real value and is ripe for renewal. We've been doing it for nothing for too long. It's time to get a grip and start selling it again.

If any of this has caught your interest, please get in touch with Bob or me.

### References and URLs

The AMED Ethical Charter. <https://www.amed.org.uk/page/ethical-charter>

Catalogue of e-O&P editions. <https://www.amed.org.uk/page/our-lively-and-engaging>

McAra, D. (2009) Ups and Downs at AMED: a personal reflection on 15 inspirational years

MacKenzie, B. (2020). Editing in transition: fresh horizons for e-O&P. This edition.

### About David

**David** is still trying to adjust to life outside paid employment after a career which included precision engineering, seafaring, rural development work in Africa, consultancy in engineering, training, management and safety. Making up his mind was never easy for him and it took him more than fifteen years to find a comfortable fit in the world of learning and development. He is very grateful to **AMED** for the part it played in enabling many important, personal discoveries during the later stages of his journey.

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# A note about AMED



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk). We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk), or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: [amedoffice@amed.org.uk](mailto:amedoffice@amed.org.uk), T: 0300 365 1247