Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as ‘quite an improvement.’

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- Information Systems Journal (ISJ)
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And review several hundred papers a year
The Journal Editor’s Dilemma

- Journals clearly receive a lot of submissions – perhaps 500-1000 or more per annum, yet:
- Many of the submissions are unsuitable for publication – even after revision
- It is easy for an editor to ‘screen out’ or ‘reject’ – but if you reject too many, there are not enough to publish!
- At the same time, all journals want to publish high quality papers.
Authors’ Motivations

- Authors seem to be more concerned with getting their research published ...and less concerned with who is going to read it.
- If the paper is unsuitable for the audience, the paper won’t be published at all.
- Each journal has its own mission, its own readership, its own style, its own audience.
- You must write appropriately for each journal!
Journal Selection

- Each journal is unique and serves a particular audience in a particular way.
- It is essential that you are very familiar with the journal that you wish to submit to.
- When you submit, you want to make the editor and reviewers’ job easier, so …
- You format the paper according to the journal’s house style and you make the presentation as good as you can.
What Editors & Reviewers Hate!

- Papers that don’t fit
  - Out of scope, irrelevant, poorly constructed
- Papers that seem to be written for another journal
  - The cover letter; the formatting style; the papers cited;
- Papers so badly written that they are unreadable
  - Get it copy-edited before you submit
- Some authors seem to be saying “Please reject my paper”!!!
In General

- Your paper needs to have one main point
  - The purpose of this paper is … [one sentence]
  - It should be relevant, novel, not obvious
  - It needs depth, detail, evidence, clarity
    - Who did and said what?

- You need to explain why the paper is suitable and interesting for this journal and its readers.
  - Motivation is critical
What Makes Your Research Interesting – for the Audience?

- We have seen thousands of papers based on TAM and similar models. Is this still interesting?
- It might be interesting for you, but that’s not the point. Is it interesting to the wider audience? Does it help you tell a good story?
- Actually, this is a significant challenge. Somehow, you need to provide a valid motivation for your research that stimulates the interest of the readers.
Storytelling

- It is critical that you can tell a story
- Ideally a story that captivates your audience and motivates them to keep reading
- Stories are powerful drivers of thinking and behaving – so they can also be powerful vehicles of communication for research
- Also, each journal has a different audience, so it expects a different kind of story
All research should have a context

- An audience often finds it easier to make sense of the story when the context is explicit

- So you need to be more or less transparent with respect to the context, bearing in mind that the audience is not familiar with it

- “We were unable to gain access to managers so we asked our undergrad students at a mid-Atlantic university to tackle managerial tasks”

- “We collected data from employees at a firm in the South West”
Who Cares?

- We often ask the question “who cares?” about research.
  - In other words, who is the audience, who wants to read it, who will find it useful or value adding or surprising or counter-intuitive or …?
- If no one (except the author) cares, then clearly it is going to be very difficult to publish it.
- But how do you know if anyone cares?
Who Cares?

- One way is to read the ‘future research’ section of recently published papers.
- Here, ‘successful’ authors explain what still needs to be done
  - Can you do it? Or something like it?
- Another way is to look at the professional literature – things like McKinsey Quarterly or CIO.com. What are the trends that they are seeing in professional life?
  - Could you research those?
Editors pay a lot of attention to the quality of the research and its likely interest.

Rigour – undertaking research according to strict standards and controls appropriate to the methodology.

Relevance – ensuring that the research is useful, contextualized, consumable, readable, meaningful, value-adding for the journal’s audience.

These two factors are critical to good research – and its publication.
Both are important. Somehow, you need to demonstrate that your research is rigorous and relevant.

Research that has a high standard of rigour, yet is so artificial that it bears no relation to reality, may be of little use to readers.

Research that is highly relevant, addressing complex problems, yet is so poorly conducted that we cannot have any confidence in the findings, is also of little use to readers.
Theory

“Theory without practice is sterile, Practice without theory is blind. Nothing is so practical as a good theory”
(Lewin, 1945)

“Nothing is so dangerous as a bad theory”
(Ghoshal, 2005)
The Purpose of Theory

- We use theories to help make sense of research phenomena
- Theories are useful if they guide and structure the research design and the telling of the research story
- Theories often implicitly assume a context:
  - Your specific context may differ, so some local adaptation or contextualisation may be needed
- [http://is.theorizeit.org/wiki/Main_Page](http://is.theorizeit.org/wiki/Main_Page)
Theoretical Contributions

- Either developing a new theory
  - Perhaps through a grounded theory approach
  - Perhaps by inductively creating propositions from data
- Or modifying, extending, refuting, refining, and/or adapting an existing theory in some (hopefully novel) way
- Or reflecting on the theoretical implications of your findings for other contexts
Indigenous Theory

- What is missing here is any indigenous perspective to theory
- What are the Albanian, Chinese, Zambian, etc. contextual factors that need to be theorized?
- Theory must be relevant in the local context – it must help us to make sense of (local) reality.
- Theorization from an indigenous perspective is challenging and controversial
  - The ISJ currently has an open call for papers on this topic.
Feedback is Invaluable

- Before sending your beautiful, perfect paper to a journal – get some perspective & feedback!
  - Share it with your friends (and enemies)
  - Send it to a conference
  - Present it in a departmental seminar or workshop
    - If your department doesn’t organise such workshops, then initiate them!

- Also, read
Genuine Feedback, not Polite Appreciation

- There is little value if the audience universally appreciates your work – because you learn very little.
- Somehow, you need to get critical feedback.
- Conference (and journal) reviews should be critical – and constructive or actionable.
- If you don’t listen to the feedback, it’s a waste of time – so listen and improve before you submit.
- It may not be perfect, but it may have a higher chance of not getting screened out!
Journal (Editors’) Expectations

- Journal editors know that you want your paper to be published.
- If they see potential, then they may be prepared to work with you – to help you reach your goal.
- To do this, you have to be prepared to work hard at improving your paper.
- In fact, your paper may change beyond all recognition from its earlier versions.
The Value of Persistence

- Top journals rarely/never accept papers unrevised.
- More commonly, you need to revise 3, 4, 5 times.
- A paper can be rejected at any stage, even after 5 rounds of revision.
- In order to maximise your chances of acceptance, there are some essential rules and principles to be aware of:
1. You Can’t Accept Your Own Paper!

- The reviewers and editors decide if the paper can be accepted, not you.
- You may not like the reviews, but you have to live with them
  - Or withdraw from the process
- You also have to revise the paper so as to accommodate the views of reviewers
- So,…
1a. Don’t Fight with the Reviewers!

- You will lose!
- Maybe they are idiots, they “just don’t get it”, they are dinosaurs… but still, they are the reviewers
- Somehow, you have to write your paper in a way that they can understand
- If one group of reviewers fails to understand, the next group will probably fail as well
1b. Don’t Ignore the Reviewers!

- It is better not to select a few comments that you can deal with and ignore the rest – the reviewers will not be impressed.

- Reviewers tend to have a high opinion of their views – when they see your revision notes, they will check very carefully to see if you did what they asked for.

- If you don’t bother with revision notes, they will get suspicious.
1c. For Example

- Recently, I was the AE on a paper investigating the adoption of KMS in China.
- The authors had conducted an extensive analysis, but they had not said anything about the Chinese context in the paper.
- Several members of the review team insisted that they should include the Chinese context
- In their revision notes, it seemed that the authors deliberately ignored this comment and the paper was unchanged in this respect.
- That is a very dangerous approach to take.
2. If You are Asked to Revise

- Break out the champagne! Celebrate!
- You are on the way to success – not there yet, but definitely on the way.
- Be grateful, because 50+% of authors are rejected after the first round!
- If the reviewers don’t understand your paper, then you must help them to understand it.
- It is your problem as much as it is their problem

  But only you can improve the paper.
2a. Responding to Reviewers

- Make sure that you address **everything** that they ask for
  - Even if you disagree with them

- Provide a detailed presentation of your changes in a three-column format
  - Left column – Sequence Number of Comments
  - Middle column – Reviewer Comments
  - Right column – Author revisions

- Revision notes may be longer than the paper itself.
# 2b. Revision Notes

## Reviewer Comment

1. **Better grounding of the problem.** Parts of the front-end of the paper read like a tutorial-like introduction of action research. In a rewrite, there are two things that I would like to see instead.

   - You imply that you do not wish to see a tutorial to CAR (even though one reviewer thinks that this is needed since some sections of the MISQ readership may not be familiar with CAR). We concur with you and have removed the tutorial aspects. The front end of the paper (pages 2-5) has been revised in order to outline the research and practical problems that we focused on.

2. I would expect a clearer attempt to establish the research-practice gap as an intellectual challenge. This is the main theme of the paper and it would therefore be useful to substantiate your understanding of this gap beyond the surface level.

   - We agree that the research-practice gap needs to be positioned clearly as an intellectual challenge (as highlighted on page 3). We have now deliberately positioned the paper in this way with the challenge manifested in the action-research dichotomy, where either action or research tends to be the focus of action research projects (as explained on page 3). We also substantiate our arguments better in the broader CAR literature (as detailed from pages 5-14).

## Author Response

3. Next comment

   - Next response
3. Be Good (and Ethical)

- Ethical standards are widely accepted
  - Plagiarism is a definite red line not to cross!
    - We do check – every paper – very carefully.
  - Self-plagiarism is equally proscribed.
    - It may be your paper, but who owns the IP?
  - At minimum, please ensure you cite **all work** appropriately
  - Also, don’t double submit
    - You will be rejected by both, and perhaps worse.
3a. Professional Codes of Ethics

- Most journals and professional societies have codes of research conduct, with carefully developed principles. Be familiar with it!
- It is not just about plagiarism, but also many other details such as use of deception, illegal/unethical practices, failure to protect research subjects’ privacy,…:
- https://aisnet.org/page/AdmBullCResearchCond
3b. Plagiarism

- I have seen several examples of submitted papers that involved high %s of plagiarised material
- Some involve multiple parallel submission of the same paper to different journals
- Some involve copying large chunks of text without attribution from the work of others.
3c. Editors’ Actions

- We always reject papers where we are certain plagiarism has taken place.
- We also contact other journals that may be involved – they may wish to take action.
- We also contact the Head of Dept or Dean of the individual to inform them.
- We may contact the AIS, if an AIS journal is involved.
- The situation can get very serious very quickly!
4. Author Blindness

- To maintain your own blindness, you can cite your own work as a ‘blind reference’ and if necessary explain to the editor how the current paper is different from the blind cited one in a cover letter.

- Getting into the habit of writing a cover letter is a good idea!

- Be open and honest, not opaque.
5. Understand the Audience

- This is imperative.
- Don’t submit to EJISDC if you never read an EJISDC paper or never cite an EJISDC paper!
- Do try to build your work on that of others, ideally people who have already published in the same journal.
- Show how your paper is a contribution to the intellectual conversation that is ongoing.
6. If you are Rejected...

- Don’t give up!
- Wait a week for the emotions to subside, then try to make sense of the reviews.
- Revise as much as you can, including references, then submit elsewhere.
- Make sure that you format the new paper for the new journal
- It can take many attempts before a paper finds its home
Final Comments

- I have tried to open up the black box of writing and revising research, primarily from the author’s and editor’s perspective.
- All of you are (potential) authors of papers that should be publishable in top journals.
- You need to set the target high.
- You will need to invest years (literally) of time and effort, not to mention tears of frustration.