

Peer Review

Review of: "Open-Access Publishing and the Reviewer Crisis: Rethinking Incentives for Quality Peer Review"

Christopher Peterson¹

1. Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, Roanoke, United States

This is a well-written and easy-to-read article on the topic of peer reviewers, particularly the challenge of recruiting senior peer reviewers. The topic of review quality, rather than simply recruiting peer reviewers, differentiates this from most other articles about the challenges of peer review. I have some additional considerations and recommendations below.

Recommendations

Perspective Section

- It would be useful to discuss the amount of time and effort often required to produce an effective review. Journal platforms also require that authors use specific forms to report their reviews. While this adds uniformity and helps ensure key areas are addressed in the review, it can be more cumbersome than submitting a more traditional list of comments and queries.
- It may be worth acknowledging that it takes years of experience and work in a particular field before most reviewers will be asked to review a manuscript. An invitation to review an article is an implicit acknowledgement of this unique and hard-earned skillset. Therefore, to review a paper isn't simply the total cost of time for that particular review, but also the utilization of a skillset that has typically come at great cost through years of work.
- While presumably a review from a senior researcher might be superior, the sheer volume of journals and publications in the present publishing environment likely makes having many or most manuscripts reviewed by a senior researcher untenable.
- The article should demonstrate (or reference) that there is a significant difference in review quality between junior and senior researchers. Review quality doesn't depend solely on a reviewer's

experience but also, for example, on their degree of engagement with the manuscript itself (i.e., the amount of effort put into the review). For journals to change their practice, it would likely have to be demonstrated that there is a significant and reproducible advantage to using senior authors as reviewers. While seniority can be a heuristic for quality, it likely isn't enough to persuade that senior researchers are clearly superior (and worth the extra money). Furthermore, there has been a formal movement by many professional organizations to engage early career researchers in the review process (including formal training on the peer review process for these researchers), which is an implicit vote of confidence that junior researchers can at least function as adequate peer reviewers.

Conclusion

- Challenges to this model need to be discussed in this article. For-profit journals are unlikely to be interested in greater spending to attract senior researchers when a review by a junior (without cost) is sufficient for the peer review model. This is perhaps the greatest barrier—unless there is a financial incentive, I suspect most journals will not spend money to attract more senior reviewers. Furthermore, this model risks a majority of papers being reviewed by a very select number of researchers. While this may increase the frequency of peer reviews by senior researchers, it also means that a higher proportion of articles will be influenced by the perspectives and experience of a select few (risking an “academic echo chamber”). Larger journals or publishers who can afford to provide higher reviewer compensation would presumably be able to attract better reviewers than smaller journals (though this is likely already the case based on journal notoriety and prestige; it is unclear if paying reviewers would widen this gap).
- The uniqueness of this article is the emphasis on attracting senior researchers for peer review. Most articles on this subject address the challenge of attracting peer reviewers, regardless of experience. I would recommend expanding on this unique point and exploring the role of the senior researcher as a peer reviewer.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.