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CQ Reviewers' Reactions to My Editorial Policies

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Abstract

[Excerpt] Peer review is an important part of the scientific process. It helps to separate good research from bad so that scarce journal pages and readers' attention go the former rather than the latter. As editor of Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (CQ), I am particularly dependent on reviewers' help because CQ is a cross-disciplinary journal whose submissions cover literatures and methodologies that vastly exceed my ken.

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Peer review is an important part of the scientific process. It helps to separate good research from bad so that scarce journal pages and readers' attention go the former rather than the latter. As editor of *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* (*CQ*), I am particularly dependent on reviewers' help because *CQ* is a cross-disciplinary journal whose submissions cover literatures and methodologies that vastly exceed my ken.

Unfortunately, the demand for good reviewers exceeds their supply, so finding and recruiting them is a difficult task that takes up substantial amounts of time and produces mixed results. At *CQ*, I send requests to review every new submissions to six people and I am lucky if two agree to provide the requested reviews. Often, I have to ask eight to 12 people before finding two reviewers for a paper. Given the breadth of the net that I must cast to secure reviews, I am frequently unfamiliar with the people who agree to review for me and they are not always good at the job. I try to recruit reviewers who have published on the topic of the paper to be reviewed, but too often, I find their reviews unhelpful or even misguided. For example, 13 (17%) of the 77 submissions I have sent out for review this year received a reviewer recommendation of acceptance or conditional acceptance AND a recommendation of rejection. Clearly, at least one of the reviewers in these cases of incompatible and irreconcilable recommendations was way off-base. These cases are particularly glaring, but they are not the only cases of problematic reviews. While the overwhelming majority of reviews I get at *CQ* contain valid comments and suggestions that are helpful to me as editor, too many do not. Moreover, if the reviews I get as an author from other journals are any indication, then *CQ* is not alone in having difficulty finding good reviewers.

In fact, difficulty recruiting reviewers may be a major reason that so many editors today have given-up their decision making authority to reviewers and become mere vote counters. One editor of a top journal has admitted such a motivation to me. When I asked that person why he or she, as editor, did not take a more active role in the review and editorial decision process, I received the following reply.

> *The answer to your question is rather simple. DIPLOMACY !!! I do not wish to alienate the reviewers who have done numerous valuable reviews and been loyal to the journal. This way it would be easier for them to digest the "bad" news if the decision goes against their recommendations.*

This reasoning is unfortunate because the scarcity of reviewers that may be driving editors to relinquish control over editorial decisions also reduces the quality of many of the reviews obtained and, thus, increases the need for editors to be more active and independent. Furthermore, it is not clear a priori that relinquishing control over the editorial decision process is necessary, or even helps, to recruit reviewers.

I used to think that the editor's views quoted above were mistaken. I did not believe most reviewers expect, or even want, to decide the fate of a paper. Nor did I believe they enjoy commenting on the same paper through numerous rounds of revision and resubmission. Rather, I thought most reviewers (like myself) work out of a sense of duty coupled with a desire to learn about new topics, research, and methods from the review experience. Thus, I believed that reviewers, especially those who are strong scholars, would prefer that editors take a more active role—desk rejecting obviously weak papers, providing their own comments on manuscripts and reviews, and making decisions on R&Rs themselves without seeking additional reviews. Based in part on that belief, I have pursued such active and independent editor policies at *CQ* (see Lynn, 2017). I thought those policies would help recruit more and better reviewers as well as protect authors from weak reviewers and encourage authors to submit more and better papers. In fact, my invitations to review papers for *CQ* inform potential reviewers about the policy of making decisions on R&Rs without seeking additional feedback because I was sure that doing so would encourage them to accept the invitation. However, these views too were untested and of questionable validity.

As an empiricist, I decided to test my beliefs about reviewers and their editorial policy preferences. To that end, I recently surveyed *CQ*'s reviewers—asking them to indicate how many journal editorial boards they served on, how they felt about various editorial policies, and how willing they would be to review for *CQ* again under the current editor and policies. Invitations to complete the survey were sent to all *CQ* reviewers registered in SAGE's online submission system and 183 people responded. The key findings from this survey are presented in Table 1.

Overall, the results indicate that I was right about some things but wrong about others. As I expected, reviewers like (more than dislike) editors to desk reject weak papers, provide their own assessment of submissions, prioritize suggested revisions, make decisions on or before the third round

Table 1.

Reviewers' Attitudes Toward Various Editorial Policies and Correlations of Each Attitude With Number of Editorial Board Memberships and Willingness to Review for *CQ* in the Future.

Editorial Policies	M (SD) of Rated Liking[a]	Correlation With Number of Editorial Board Memberships	Correlation With Willingness to Review for *CQ* Again Under Current Editor and Policies[b]
Editor accepts and uses existing reviews of papers rejected at other journals	4.10 (1.86)	.03	.09
Editor desk rejects 60% to 70% of submissions	4.68*** (1.75)	.13	.16[†]
Editor provides his or her own evaluation of manuscripts (beyond what the reviewers said)	5.05*** (1.82)	.02	.27**
Editor explains what problems/issues MUST be addressed for a successful R&R and what problems/issues are less important	6.01*** (1.29)	.04	.17
Editor goes against reviewer recommendations he or she disagrees with by accepting papers that reviewers recommend be rejected	3.63** (1.84)	−.01	.15[†]
Editor goes against reviewer recommendations he or she disagrees with by rejecting papers that reviewers recommend be accepted	3.43*** (1.77)	.03	.12
Editor lets reviewers drive decisions on manuscripts[c]	5.02*** (1.56)	.04	−.02
Editor does not wait for late reviews before making an editorial decision on papers	4.49*** (1.67)	.04	.26**
Editor almost always sends R&R's back to reviewers[c]	5.19*** (1.52)	.04	.03
Editor almost never sends R&Rs back to reviewers	3.33*** (1.60)	−.04	.11
Editor makes a final decision on or before the third round of consideration (R&R # 2)	5.09*** (1.62)	.07	.24**
Editor provides reviewers with copies of editorial decisions/letters	5.97*** (1.38)	.03	.10
Editor provides reviewers with copies of the other reviewers' comments	6.02*** (1.42)	.01	.06
Column Ns	180-183	177-180	150-153

Note. CQ = Cornell Hospitality Quarterly.
[a]On a scale where 1 = *dislike a great deal*, 4 = *neither like nor dislike*, and 7 = *like a great deal*. Asterisks in this column reflect significance of means' differences from midpoint of 4.
[b]Only includes those who reviewed at least one manuscript for *CQ* under my editorship to ensure some familiarity with my editorial policies.
[c]This is an editorial policy that I do not follow.
[†]$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

of review, and provide them with copies of editorial decisions and other reviewers' comments. However, contrary to my assumptions (but consistent with those of the editor quoted previously), reviewers like to drive editorial decisions on manuscripts and want an opportunity to comment on R&Rs. Also contrary to my assumptions, more and less experienced reviewers (as reflected in number of editorial board memberships) have similar attitudes toward these editorial policies. Fortunately, contrary to both my assumptions and those of the editor quoted previously, the surveyed reviewers' willingness to review again for *CQ* was largely independent of their attitudes toward these editorial policies (see Table 1).

Clearly, reviewers like active, but not independent, editors. Thus, the optimal editorial policies from a reviewer's perspective fall between those of myself and of the editor quoted previously. Given that my term as editor ends in only a few months, I will not be making any changes in *CQ*'s editorial policies. However, I hope my recounted experiences as editor along with the feedback I have received from authors and reviewers will help my successor, as well as other editors, to adopt better policies in the future.

Michael Lynn

Reference

Lynn, M. (2017). CQ authors' reactions to my editorial policies and practices. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 58, 324-328.