

Are we going to face a quandary in finding efficient reviewers for scientific publications?

Publication of a paper in a scientific journal involves several entities, the prime components being the author/s, reviewer/s, editor and publisher. The quality of the publication as well as the journal (often controversially judged by the journal impact factor), acting often in a bidirectional mode, largely depend on the quality of the reviewer/s. An author always tries to put the best in the manuscript (limited by his/her capability). However, he/she might have limitations of availability of instruments or of outlook, and may overlook some important point/s while performing the experiments, or analysing the data and/or putting them properly in the manuscript. It is the referee who principally evaluates whether the work reported in the manuscripts fits for the journal to which it has been submitted. The job of the referee is not merely to select 'Yes' or 'No'. As an expert, it is his/her responsibility to criticize the work positively and make suggestions (even advising newer experiments, where applicable) to improve the work if possible. This evaluation is the stem of the whole process of publication that raises the quality of the paper as well as the journal, in a cumulative manner.

In recent times, for some reason a host of journals has come up. This has disturbed the basic aspect of the quality of reviewing all the manuscripts submitted to all the journals, principally because of the huge increase in the load of papers to evaluate. This is one aspect. The other aspect is the selection of quality reviewers. Most of the journals depend on the

evaluation reports of more than one reviewer (although acceptance/rejection of any manuscript in a journal is the prerogative of the editor). Sometimes they have to take decision based on a single report. Particularly in these cases, the quality of the review is even more crucial. The reviewers sometimes are reluctant to stick to the time limit given to them by the journal editor. This delays the whole process of publication, eventually lowering the essence of the impact of good science. Some reviewers are casual in the review process and do not go through the manuscript critically and do not consult the relevant references necessary for an effective review process. From my personal experience, I would like to cite a reasonable number of cases where the submitted manuscripts were not accepted for publication in some journals and later on, the same manuscripts were published in better journals of higher impact and reputation (maybe, with some revision as suggested by the reviewers of the journals where they were eventually published). In these cases I do not fully blame the editor/s. The editor is supposed to rely on the reviewers. The wrong or inefficient review/s from the referee/s might have misled the editor to take the inappropriate negative decision. However, the editor should critically go through the review reports and judge if the report is acceptable or not. Misjudgment of a worthy manuscript from a journal sometimes discourages the quality authors from submitting the next manuscript to the journal.

Sometimes, it is even painful to see self-contradictions within a paper published even in a good journal. This happens particularly when the content of the paper comes from different segments of science. Problems in such cases can be tackled by simultaneously inviting experts from the respective sections. Although this often requires a greater number of reviewers, it is unavoidable to maintain the sanity of science.

We have to strictly resist degradation in the quality of reviewing for the benefit of the journals as well as science. Timely and quality reviewing must be encouraged and cultivated. Since reviewing is an unpaid service, people often lose interest in it. However, reviewers should consider the fact that if everyone thinks the same way as he/she does, then the publication process including those of his/her own papers would stop. In this respect, my perspective is that the journal should encourage quality reviewers in some way, not by paying money, but showing appreciation in some other innovative way. In short, attempts need to be made to encourage the inclusion of quality reviewers since they play a pivotal role in maintaining the sanity and quality of science and scientific journals.

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