Models of Editing and Editorial Boards

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Introduction

Journals are distinguished from each other by a number of factors that ultimately can influence the size and structure of the editorial board, the “way” that editors edit and other editorially related issues. This chapter investigates some of these issues ultimately generating models of editorial boards and the editorial process.

This chapter is particularly concerned with editorial boards inasmuch as they provide organization and support to editors. Although editorial boards exert influence on their editorial activity, editors probably seldom choose the model of their editorial board. Even when editors are part of a start-up journal the editorial board format and number of members is likely to be copied from some existing journal as a benchmark.

As a result, the purpose of this chapter is to provide some models of editing and editorial boards in order to begin generation of a theory of editing and editorial boards. In particular, this chapter captures key variables from the editing and editorial processes and examines the potential impact of those variables on editing and editorial boards. Specifically, this chapter builds a model where three independent variables (journal size, whether they are supported by an association, and the base discipline) are related to two dependent variables (number and organizational structure of the editorial board). Such a model would allow empirical analysis of a key supporting structure for editors, the editorial board.

* This and other empirical questions in this chapter need empirical assessment.
Outline of This Chapter

The chapter proceeds as follows. This first section provides motivation for the chapter and introduces the chapter. The next section reviews a model of the factors that appear to lead to the editorial board structure and size. The third section examines an empirical model of editorial board size and organization. The following two sections discuss the impact of journal sponsorship on both the time that an editor is an editor at a particular journal and the extent to which the sponsorship provides a voice to the editor. Next, a range of different approaches to editing is examined, going from a classical approach to different extremes, including crowdsourcing. The section also examines some variables that could influence which approach is used. Then the issue of referee report evaluation is examined, followed by a section examining a number of “special” editorial situations that have occurred over the years. The next section examines a sequence of topics that keep editors awake at night. Finally, the last section summarizes the chapter and examines its contributions.

Variables for a Model of Size and Structure of Editorial Boards

The purpose of this section is to discuss the independent and dependent variables of a model of journal editorial boards. Such a model could provide the initial basis of a theoretical and empirical study of academic journals, their editorial boards, and other characteristics.

Independent Variables: Size, Association, and Discipline

This section lays out some of the potential independent variables that could influence the editorial variables of size and editorial board structure. In particular, this chapter suggests that those independent variables include the size of the journal, whether the journal is associated with a society or other sponsoring group, and the “discipline” that the journal functions in, for example, computer science or psychology. First, different journals vary by size, where size could be measured by many variables. For example, size could be measured by the number of papers or pages submitted each year or the number of papers or
pages published in each year in the journal.* That size variable can affect a number of operational activities associated with editing a journal, because, in general, the more papers there are to process the more people are required to process them. Second, journals are published by different sources, ranging from societies (IEEE or ACM) and special interest groups to independent publishing groups (e.g., Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, etc.). Those societies and special interest groups have members who receive the journal, often as part of being a member in the organization. Accordingly, in some cases, the journals have been established to provide a particular perspective or to provide their members with a “voice” or representation. Third, journals are a part of virtually every academic discipline. Specific disciplines or leading journals in those disciplines could provide editorial models from which journals model themselves. Such existing journals in the discipline are likely to provide models of best practices or ways of doing business that are at least partially related to the particular discipline. Thus, the discipline can provide models of editorial boards and editing.

Dependent Variables: Editorial Board Size and Structure

There are at least two editorial variables that appear to be dependent on those independent variables. Each of these two variables is readily visible, typically on the inside cover of the journal or on the journal web page, where the editorial board and structure are given. Perhaps the most visible aspect of that editorial board is the number of editors. Analysis of editorial boards suggests that the total number of editors on those journal editorial boards varies substantially. For example, the total size of the editorial board can range from 10 or 20 members to 100 or more.

Editorial boards typically provide a formal structure to support the editor. The organization of editorial boards can range from a single editor and his or her editorial board to multiple layers of editors, such as associate and assistant editors. In addition, editorial boards can

* Size could be measured from an input perspective (e.g., papers submitted), an output perspective (e.g., pages published), and from the relationship between inputs and outputs (papers submitted/papers published).
include advisory boards or other structures. Journals and their editorial boards provide a peculiar type of organization with particular editorial board structures and sizes. As such, they could provide important empirical data that could be studied in hopes of understanding editorial board best practices or optimal organizational forms.

Editorial board structure influences or reflects the day-to-day operation of the journal. In more hierarchical editorial organizations, the editor often does not actually edit papers. Instead the editor assigns the paper to an associate editor who is responsible for managing the referee process. In some settings, the associate editor makes a publication recommendation, whereas in other settings the associate editor makes the final decision.

Editorial Board Model

This section examines the relationship between the variables provided in the previous section to generate a model of editorial boards that can be investigated empirically. The model is summarized in Figure 9.1.

**Effect of Size**

*Apriori* the size of the journal can be expected to influence the number of editors required to process those papers. For example, if there are a

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**Figure 9.1** Model of editorial boards.
larger number of papers rather than a smaller number of papers there is likely to be a need for more editorial capabilities (more editors). Furthermore, as the number of papers increases, rather than having the editor make every decision, associate editors could be given the authority to make decisions about papers. Accordingly, as the demand to process papers increases, a hierarchical structure could be needed to accommodate the larger number of editors.

Effect of Journal Sponsorship

Journal sponsorship can influence the number of editors. For example, if a journal is one of a portfolio of journals owned by some organization, then the number of editors in the other journals could provide a reference model to be followed. In addition, journals associated with sponsorship settings ultimately could have promulgated an editorial board structure, either because of the existence of successful models from related journals or because the group effectively recommends a particular model. As a result, we would expect that journals sponsored by the same group may have similar organizational models.

Effect of Discipline

Similarly, the discipline in which the journal is based can affect the number of editors and the organizational model of the editorial board. The discipline provides a number of related journals that can be used to provide reference models of both the number of editors and the editorial model.

Power and Editorial Board Size and Structure

“Power” may be a critical issue at some point in the evaluation of board size and structure. If an editorial board is smaller rather than larger, that would suggest that each member of the board has more “power” regarding the possibility of getting published in the journal. Furthermore, different editorial board structures appear to put the editorial power in different groups of editors. For example, if the editorial board uses associate editors who make editorial decisions then the power of the editor is diffused to those associate editors who have
increased power. Similarly, if only the editor makes publication decisions then the editorial power is more concentrated.

Concerns with editor power probably are most likely to manifest themselves in sponsored journals. However, a priori, it is unclear if journal sponsorships result in diffusing publication power of the editor to associate editors who make publication decisions or if they centralize the power in editorial models where a single editor makes editorial decisions on papers.

Relationship between Size and Editorial Board Structure

Finally, it may be that editorial board size and structure are related. If there are a large number of editors it can prove to be necessary to generate organizational structure devices to help manage them. For example, if there are a large number of editors, it could facilitate organization and processing of papers to have some editors (associate editors) charged with different decisions, such as determining whether a paper should be published. Alternatively, certain structures are likely to be able to accommodate a larger editorial board. For example, if there are associate editors charged with making editorial decisions on papers, then they are likely to need (or accommodate) additional editors to help referee the papers. Accordingly, research of these issues might also draw from the classic span of control literature.

Effect of Sponsorship on Time as Editor

What are the primary variables that seem to influence the editor’s tenure at a particular journal? Perhaps the most important variable is likely to be whether the editorial position is for an independent journal or a society/section journal. Editorial activities for society and section journals are typically limited to “terms,” for example, three or four years. Editors may get multiple terms, however, from my experience, editors rarely get more than one or two terms. On the other hand, editorial tenure for independent journals can be arbitrarily long: there are rarely specific terms of service. Although the other two independent variables (size and discipline) from Figure 9.1 also may affect editorial tenure, their overall effects are not likely as influential.
Effects of Sponsorship on “Editorial Voice”

There probably are a number of different variables that appear to influence the model of editing used by an editor. Based on my experience, one particularly important variable is whether the journal is independent sponsored.

Editing a Privately Held Journal

As an editor of an independent, privately held journal there probably is greater freedom than any other editorial environment. Generally, as long as the journal issues are produced on time with the appropriate quality, the publisher is making money, and there are no complaints, the editor faces few constraints. If the editor sees a paper that he finds interesting, he literally can ask the author to submit the paper to the journal. If the referees don’t like a paper then the editor still has the prerogative to publish the paper. If an editor wants to pursue a topic she can solicit a paper on that topic.

Editing a Sponsored Journal

In some cases the journal is part of some group such as a section from a society, and the editor represents the members of that society. Editors of section journals can face political battles over the content: “There should be more $x$ research; you are biased too much toward $y$ research.” Editorially this can mean trying to give the sponsoring member a “voice” in the editorial process. In that situation, the perspective of the members of the section becomes critical.

For me being the editor of a section journal meant ensuring that the voice of the section was heard and finding a way to embed that into the editorial process. For each paper, this meant relying heavily on referee reports that were gathered specifically from section members. Accordingly, as the editor of a section journal, I relied very heavily on the judgment of the referees who I made sure were all gathered from the sponsoring section.
Role of Editor: Individual or Group?

Editing generally is seen as a role in a group activity, with the editor functioning within the context of an editorial board. Although it appears that most editors employ a “classical” approach to editing, there are at least two other extremes. At one extreme, the editor plays such a strong role that the entire editorial process can be reduced to a single role, the editor. At the other extreme, the editor is simply one member of the crowd and the overall approach to editing is one of crowdsourcing editing.

Classical Model of the Editor

In the classic (traditional) approach authors submit their papers to the editor who then assigns the paper to two or more referees. The editor may or may not read the paper. Each of the referees then completes a report on the paper with a recommendation that ranges from rejecting the paper to revising the paper to publishing the paper as is. After the editor has received both reports, she examines the consensus of the referees and makes her decision based on the referee reports.

Editing as “This is Mine”

In contrast to the classic model, the “this is mine” editor often takes a heavy hand on most papers. For example, the editor may completely review the paper before he decides whether to send the paper to the referees. In this setting, the editor may completely rewrite sentences and even entire sections. Usually the author is not in a position to object, so most authors simply implement the editor’s changes.

In the case of “this is mine” the editor makes a number of explicit suggestions that must be taken, down to the sentence level. Oftentimes the “this is mine” editor includes the referee report of a single referee. Although I have never used this model, it is my suspicion that in this case, the referee is likely to be the editor or one of his key editorial board members.
Editing as “Crowdsourcing”

At another extreme, writing and editing can take the form of crowdsourcing. A research paper is sent to a senior editor and then to the referees and input is gathered. In general, the more referees there are, the more additional information that can be gathered. The editor may review the paper and provide an additional set of comments. In so doing the authors can get many new ideas related to the paper. Over the years I have had a number of authors thank the referees and editors for new ideas for research papers deriving from the crowdsourcing model.

Some journals push this crowdsourcing model even before the paper is submitted, encouraging the author to submit the paper to major conferences before submitting the paper to the journal. In so doing the paper gathers increasing amounts of input from the crowd. In addition, the paper gets additional credibility stamps of having been accepted and presented at the set of particular conferences.

Although the comments may not necessarily be helpful, the authors are not in a position to not accept the crowd’s suggestions because the editor and referees typically will have at least another opportunity to evaluate the paper. Although some papers are heavily crowdsourced, the reader will not know other than by reviewing the acknowledgments.

Editorial Devices for Crowdsourcing

There are a number of devices that can facilitate editorial crowdsourcing. For example, papers can be posted and referees can choose to referee a paper or a part of a paper. Similarly, associate editors could choose to take control of editing a paper rather than being assigned a paper. Potentially, referees and editors could vote on whether to accept a paper. However, such approaches could arguably generate inappropriate or biased reviews from participants who are not “arms-length.” Finally, there could be a concern that the editorial work might not get done: “Who will take the paper that no one wants to review?”

Which Model?

Based on my experience the classic model and its crowdsourcing nature are the most frequently used. The model in Figure 9.1 provides
at least two sets of variables as to why. The use of the “this is mine” approach likely has mostly been outside sponsored society settings where the editor is based in an independent journal and there are no real “member” concerns. In addition, the number of papers submitted and processed can also influence the editorial approach. For example, if there are a substantial number of papers submitted, then the editor is not likely to have sufficient time to play a major role in evaluating each paper. Finally, the discipline also is likely to have an effect with editors in similar disciplines potentially following similar archetypes.

Evaluating Referee Reports

On the surface, being a journal editor means sending a paper to referees, waiting for their reports, and then reporting the results to the author. The ideal situation is where two or more referees each submit their referee reports in a timely manner, substantiating their evaluation with well-reasoned comments in sufficient detail so as to be able to follow the reasoning behind their recommendation, while simultaneously providing sufficient guidance to the author for revising the paper. In addition, in this ideal situation, the referees have similar judgments, of which the editor can confirm and generate a timely response to the authors. Unfortunately, the ideal situation is relatively rare. Referees oftentimes disagree with each other and the quality of their discussions of the paper may be very limited.

One Accept and One Reject

A difficult situation for editors arises when there are two referee reports, one “accept” and one “reject.” In addition, to confound the situation further, in this setting, inevitably, one of the referee reports does not provide much insight into why the referee made the evaluation that he did. As a result, this setting often requires that the editor be the “tie breaker” or that additional referees be sought. In either case, this can substantially extend the review time for the paper.

Contradictory Referee Reports While shepherding a paper through the editorial process it is not unusual to receive two widely different referee reports. In one recent case, one of the referee reports indicated
that the scope of the paper should be cut down because the paper was too broad. That referee also indicated that the paper was too long. However, the other referee report suggested that the paper was too narrow and really needed to consider other issues. The second referee suggested that the paper was too short. The reviews went as far as literally to suggest excluding/including the same issues.

Although the author can try to accommodate both, it is unlikely that he will be successful in such a situation. Such divergent reports effectively require the editor to make a decision one way or the other.

*The Hardest Thing Is to Say … “Accept”*

In academia, PhD students are taught to find limitations in research by analyzing a broad range of papers. Even papers that are published in well-respected journals, generating large numbers of citations, sometimes are criticized as “mistakes.”

As a result, in many cases the hardest thing for a referee (or editor) is to say yes to a paper. Instead, as a referee or the editor, the “safest” strategy is just say no. After all, every paper can be improved, at least from some perspective. Accordingly, it is easy to say no to a paper because the data could be better, or the previous research is not as complete as it could be, or it could be better written, or there is more analysis that could be done. Unfortunately, we are not often taught to find the beauty in a paper.

**Special (Editorial) Circumstances**

As an editor there can be some “difficult” special circumstances. For example, editors may note that some contributors are particularly influential and well known (e.g., the “Big Hitter”). As another example, editors may solicit a paper from a specific user or group of users resulting in its own concerns.

*Editing the “Big Hitter”*

I refer to the well-published, influential, and well-known researcher, as the “Big Hitter.”
An important question is, "Do editors treat papers from Big Hitters in the same way as papers that are not from Big Hitters?" Based on the behavior of junior authors who let Big Hitters on their papers, sometimes for little academic activity, it is clear that junior authors think so. Many junior authors think that all they need to do is have the Big Hitter as a coauthor and that guarantees a paper for acceptance.

Most editors employ a double-blind review process. Accordingly, the appearance of the Big Hitter as an author should be eliminated by the process. However, in some cases referees try to identify the authors. In other settings the process is not double-blind so that the reviewer knows who the authors are. As a result, there can be information corrupting the editorial process so that reviewers can determine the authors.

In my experience, the Big Hitter is not treated differently, but the question as to whether they are treated differently is an empirical one. I can say that I have found that Big Hitters typically are publication savvy. Big Hitters know better how to sell a paper and they understand basic issues such as the authors need to respond to each of the comments generated by referees.

**Editing the Solicited Paper**

In some settings the editor will seek out a paper from a particular author or group of authors, effectively promising to publish that paper. Editing this paper can be problematic, because the editor wants the paper contributed but on the other hand he or she wants to make sure it is done well and meets the needs of the journal. If the paper is not initially well done it can be difficult getting the appropriate changes. In any case, soliciting papers is much easier independent of any sponsoring organizations inasmuch as there is no concern for equity of members or biasing the editorial process for a nonmember.

**Editing the Special Issue**

In some settings special issues of a journal are delegated to a special issue editorial team. In this case the journal editor has to decide if he trusts that editorial team "enough" or if he should provide an
additional layer of editing or refereeing. Alternatively, if there are a number of special issues then that can result in adoption of the editorial board to provide the appropriate editorial participation.

What Keeps Editors Up at Night?

What are some of the major concerns of editors? Ethical issues, such as using valid data, are some of the key concerns of editors. In addition, editors are probably most concerned about getting referees actually to referee papers that they say they will referee.

Valid Data and Results

Perhaps the most important issue facing each editor relates to the information in the research papers that he ultimately publishes: Are the results real? In some cases there have been research papers where the researchers have been accused of literally making up the data.

One of the most recent cases focuses on a well-known accounting professor from Bentley University in Boston. The case of James Hunton has been documented in a sequence of newspaper articles from The Boston Globe (Healy, 2012, 2014) and a report from Bentley University's ethics officer (Malone, 2014, “Bentley Report”).

After the retraction of a research paper because of concerns about data in the original paper (Hunton and Gold, 2013) and after the report from Bentley University’s ethics officer (Malone, 2014), there was substantial concern by the sponsoring organization (American Accounting Association—AAA) that owned the journal that published the retracted paper about what the findings meant to both other authors and other research papers. For example, as noted in Malone (2014) the confidential incident reporter raised concerns about 10 other papers. Furthermore, as noted by the executive director of the AAA, Sutherland (2014, p. 2) “… a small team has been tasked with developing and implementing the steps necessary to address the implications of the Bentley report across all journals published by the AAA.” Not just the authors of the original paper would be affected, but additional authors and additional journals potentially
would be affected. As noted by Sutherland (2014, p. 2) “… our next steps will involve reaching out to all coauthors of the 30 related articles published across eight of our journals, asking them to provide independent evidence of the validity of the data on which their articles are based.” Accordingly, there was concern about whether some of Hunton’s other previous research papers published by the AAA were based on valid or invalid data. Finally, Sutherland (2014) also noted that the AAA “… will take action as warranted by outcomes of our process.” As a result, additional papers may also be affected by these investigations.

*Have the Results Been Published Before?*

Another critical concern is, “Has the paper been published before?” There are at least three ways that lead to determining if the paper has been previously published. First, I have had referees indicate on their reports that the paper (or one that looks a lot like the paper sent them to review) has been published before either because they knew about the previous version or ran across it as part of the referee process. Second, I have found the paper as part of an informal search to determine if the paper had been previously published. Third, there are now tools (analogous to “Blackboard”) available to search the Internet to determine if the paper has been previously published or the extent to which the paper has appeared in other forms or settings.

*Referees*

As an editor a key activity is choosing referees for a paper. Occasionally, I have found that potential referees accept the assignment, but then do not provide a review or provide a useless review with no real substantive comments. Unfortunately, by the time that the editor finds out either situation, the paper typically has been in process for a relatively long period of time. Furthermore, typically, another referee must be found and given sufficient time to review the paper. Accordingly, I have found that the lack of appropriate referee response is the primary factor slowing the editorial process.
Summary, Contributions, and Extensions

This chapter has presented some models of editorial boards and editing and examined some of the issues that editors face. This discussion suggests that issues such as journal size (input, output, or the relationship between them), sponsorship, and discipline can have a major impact on editing and editorial boards.

Contributions

This chapter generated models of editing and the editorial board. In so doing, this chapter has generated a number of assertions about editorial boards and the editorial process that ultimately could begin to generate a “theory of the editorial process.” In addition, many of those assertions and models could be analyzed empirically. For example, the chapter noted that it appears that larger journals (e.g., with more paper submissions) are more likely to employ an editorial model with associate editors who are responsible for ensuring that papers get refereed and ultimately making decisions regarding paper acceptance. As another example, the chapter analyzed the impact of journal sponsorships on a range of different variables, including editorial boards and editing.

Extensions

There are a number of extensions to the discussion in this chapter. First, the models generated in this chapter are largely based on my experience as an editor, referee, and author. However, it would seem that some existing theory could be applied to some of these issues. For example, in the models developed in this chapter the size of the organization (e.g., number of submissions, number of pages printed, etc.) seems to affect editorial boards and editing. Similarly, organization size has played an important part in economic-based models of organizations. As a result, additional theories could be generated and embedded in these models of editing and editorial boards. Second, in this chapter, editorial board size and structure were each treated as dependent variables. However, it is likely that there is some interaction between those two variables. For example, a large editorial board...
likely requires more hierarchical structure than a small editorial board. Third, it can be argued that editorial boards provide a signal as to the nature and quality of the journal, a governance model of how papers will be refereed, a ready-to-use source of editing and refereeing capabilities, and a signal as to by whom and how each paper will be refereed. Further research could investigate the extent to which those signals could be captured by empirical models of editorial boards. Fourth, a number of journals employ special issues generated by either existing editorial board members or those from outside the editorial board. Typically, those special issues are based on papers from a workshop or symposium or the papers are chosen around a special topic or a limited scope. As a result, oftentimes those special issues require the ability to depend on the editors to ensure that the content is refereed appropriately. As a result, this can require an organization scheme which captures that independence. Fifth, perhaps time also plays a significant role in journal editorial boards. For example, as a journal evolves over time the structures used to govern it can evolve to include increasing levels of complexity, such as having multiple types of editorial board members.

References
