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A letter from the editors

As we begin our final three-year term as editors, we would like to reflect on the learning steep learning curve we have been on for the last five years since we took over the journal on January 1, 2005. This document briefly summarizes our thoughts.

1. Changing the culture of the editorial process

When we took over the journal, one of our main goals was to change the culture of the editorial process, so that it works better for authors. In our opinion, it is unacceptable that the editorial process at a given journal often takes more than two years and numerous editorial rounds. In the best of circumstances, the result is a published paper. In the worst case scenario, papers are rejected after several years and several revisions. This is not the way things should work – and at the IJIO, we have made major changes in this culture.

Working with our excellent editorial board of Co-editors and Associate Editors, we implemented two important changes:

- (1) Instituting an initial desk (or rapid) review: This review is conducted by one of us for each paper submitted to the journal: Papers (on average) go through this initial desk review in the two week period following submission. Approximately 56% of the submissions have been rejected at the initial desk review over the last five years. This frees up editorial resources for handling the papers that the journal indeed wants to publish. But, that change alone, would not have been enough.
- (2) Streamlining the editorial process: Although we have no formal requirement to the effect, papers that are sent back to the authors (by editors and co-editors) with a “revise-&-resubmit” decision are expected to take a single round of significant revisions. Hence, editors and co-editors are expected only to invite papers to be resubmitted if they believe that it is possible for the major revisions to be completed in a single round. This policy is different from a no-revise submission option (in which papers are either accepted as is or rejected.) But the goal is similar – editors and referees should not be in the business of rewriting the papers or micro-managing the details.

This policy seems to be working well. Of the 277 accepted papers since we took over the journal, 20 were accepted with no revisions, 114 were accepted after a single revision, and 119 were accepted after two revisions. Hence less than 10% of the accepted papers needed more than two rounds of revisions. This is encouraging!

Additionally, the true number of “real revision” rounds is much lower: once papers are formally accepted in our journal software, they cannot be edited, even by the authors. Hence, even if a paper needed one small change, the formal editorial decision would be “revise.”

Evidence for this is illustrated by the average time it takes authors to revise papers:

Revision 1: 159 days; Revision 2: 52 days; Revision 3: 29 days.

Finally, only 26 papers were rejected after an original revise-and-resubmit decision; 22 of the reject decisions were given on the initial revision. Only four papers that went more than one round were eventually rejected.

This, of course, does not mean it is easy to publish a paper in the journal. Only 17% of the submissions over the last five years received a “revise-&-resubmit” or “accept” (initial) editorial decision.

2. Improving the quality of the journal

Our other main goal was to improve the quality of the papers published. We believe that changes in the editorial process described above have helped improve quality as well. The significant increase in the journal impact factor provides evidence that quality has improved.

The (two-year) journal Impact Factor, which is published by Thomson Reuters, is a measure of the frequency with which the average article that appeared in a journal in the previous two years is cited in a particular year. The 2008 Impact Factor, for example, measures citations received in 2008 to all articles published in 2007 and 2006, divided by the number of articles published in 2007 and 2006.

We were very interested in the 2008 impact factor, because it is the first one that truly reflects the work of the new editorial board. Although we took over the editorship of the journal in 2005, most of the papers published in that year were accepted by the previous editorial board. The IJIO's 2008 impact factor, which is based on papers published in 2006 & 2007, was 1.075. This is the first time the journal has had an impact factor above one (based on data going back to the 1995 impact factor), and it represents a more than doubling of the impact factor over the 2007 level. Although it is just a single result, we are confident that the hard work of editorial board and the changes in the editorial process will lead to high impact factor numbers for the IJIO in the years to come.

3. Changes in the institutional structure of the journal

The addition of an independent scientific advisory board (SAB:) The SAB must approve all new co-editor appointments and will lead the process to replace the three of us when we finish our term at the end of 2012. The SAB can also be consulted when there are editorial disputes. The European Association of Research in Industrial Economics (EARIE) is responsible for appointing three members to the SAB,

while the editors appoint three members as well. We believe that the SAB is an important addition to the journal.

4. The future

There is a lot of work to be done and we will continue to work hard with our editorial board to continue to attract and publish outstanding papers and to continue improving the culture of the editorial process for authors. We also plan to introduce some innovations: Look for the first annual Papers and Proceedings Issue (later this year) and for brief video presentations of accepted papers on our website.

Sincerely,

The Editors
Patrick Bajari
Bernard Caillaud
Neil Gandal

8 March 2010