We are all authors, but at the same time we are all reviewers. We write articles, anticipate that they will be reviewed quickly and favorably and hope that they will be accepted. We write reviews and anticipate that our recommendations will be honored and our concerns will be addressed. The work of authors is visible and rewarding (if published), the work of reviewers is anonymous and not that gratifying. Most of the time the authors are known while the reviewers are bound under double secrecy: their names cannot be revealed and the proprietary authors’ data are also kept confidential and should not be utilized by the reviewers. The authors’ contribution is very regimented (must adhere to elaborate guidelines) while on the other side, the reviewers’ input is mostly open to improvisation. There are some exceptions; for example, when the authors may suggest a reviewer for their manuscript or when reviewers intentionally reveal their identity.

What could possibly be the incentive for reviewers to participate, spending time, pointing out someone’s mistakes, giving recommendations and sometimes revealing their own ideas? The likely answers might include the satisfaction of being considered an expert, or to be recognized as an active participant in the field, however this brings very modest contentment. There is also the exposure to the new and confidential ideas of competitors with all possible implications. An insider’s peek into someone’s plans could be crucial, just like having access to the research and development department of a major company, which is why many findings are not published prior to patenting. The reviewer also has the ability to reject an author’s approach, being himself an author or a zealot supporter of a different view or being in competition for grants, publications, glory, etc. The reviewer also may speed up his own investigation while postponing others’.

The authors may influence a reviewer by guessing who may be a potential reviewer and referencing and praising their work, making it harder for them to reject a paper that has a paragraph acclaiming their work. However, this is a double edged sword and may be harmful if the author acclaims the reviewer’s competitor or ignores, even criticizes, the reviewer’s contribution.

Nobody wants to discuss the dark side; however it does not change the fact that it may happen, though it is very rare. This is where the Chief Editor and the Editorial Board should exhibit moral judgment, in addition to an expertise on the topic. This is (besides, of course, the integrity of honorable reviewers) what allows the new and controversial to clash freely in disputes with the old and established for equal representation and ultimately, forward movement in the field.

Every reviewer has experienced the situation in which he has reviewed the same paper time and again after it has been resubmitted to the other journals and felt anger (rightly so) if the recommendations were blatantly ignored.

We are all aware of the deficiencies of the authors for which it is the job of the reviewer to point the finger, but we also remember our own mistakes as reviewers that remain confidential and are very difficult to acknowledge.

A review may be very brief and ultimately limited to a final recommendation, such as a check-mark beside ‘accept’, ‘reject’ or ‘accept with revisions’ on the journal’s website. It all depends on the interest of the subject to the reviewer, the time available at that moment, etc., and the causes could be unlimited. It also depends on inspiration because all writing species (ultimately as poets) exhibit it once in a while. On the other side, the review could be very complicated for the same (and sometimes unexpected and unexplainable) reasons mentioned above. I also have to acknowledge my luck in getting an extremely thoughtful, professional, elaborate review of my own article, though I regret it was a negative one.

Speaking of long reviews, I recently reviewed a 49 word article with a 392 word review on a subject that was not of particular interest to me and it is unexplainable why I did it, however I am proud of it. At the end of that review I devised a new rubrication (so far there are not very many for the reviewers) to divide the word count of the text by the word count of the review (I call it ‘Fokin’s Index’ or FI). In my case,
the FI was 0.125 which means that for each authors’ word, I
wrote 8 words of review, thus, I believe, establishing some
kind of record. Therefore, the smaller the index, the more
elaborate the review. The opposite record will be a full size
manuscript utilizing the maximum allowed word count
divided by one word (yes or no) for the shortest possible
review. For these mathematical perversions, I invented the
title ‘Distinguished and Creative Reviewer’ (DCR) and appeal
to the Chief Editor to grant me this title. Obviously, the title
is well-deserved by numerous, hard-working reviewers who,
for decades, have carried the task of evaluating hundreds of
papers for countless journals, without which the peer-review
approach would cease to exist. Indeed, we have all witnessed
the artistic nature of many authors through their ingenious
and innovative writings. But who will establish the numeric
value or merit of the reviews, or the eligibility of a reviewer
for the DCR title? For this, we need reviewers of the reviews!
But with all seriousness, only the Editorial Office can provide
enlightenment on the virtually unknown and hidden world of
reviewership. (Does this word exist? If not, I believe it
should.)

Obviously, I have not covered all the possible situations
concerning reviewers and reviews, which can sometimes be
dramatic, sometimes humorous, and sometimes even
instigate discoveries. I hope others will contribute to this
subject, unearthing some dazzling stories or coming up with
new ideas regarding the review process.

I hope my current writing will be reviewed favorably and
will be published and have a positive response from the
peers.

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