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## Reviewing excellence

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# Reviewing excellence

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Creativity and Innovation Management has grown substantially over the last couple of years, both quantitatively and qualitatively. From 2016 to 2021, the number of submissions has grown from 287 to 395. Most of the growth was realized in Asia: The number of submissions from that continent increased from 72 in 2016 to 193 in 2021. The rest of the world remained (close to) stable: 215 in 2016 and 203 in 2021. Equally important, the Thomson ISI Impact Factor increased from 1.423 in 2015 to 3.051 in 2021 and further to 3.644 in 2022. This is not where our ambitions end, though. We want to be the ever-better outlet for authors researching, and practitioners working in, the fields we cover. Editing a journal with the ambition to continuously increase its quality while dealing with a substantial growth requires teamwork—teamwork among the editors and the editorial office, teamwork between the editors and their reviewers and, as surprising as this may sound, teamwork between the authors and their reviewers in a top-quality reviewing process. The purpose of this piece is to present and discuss some reviewing standards. In particular, we aim to share with our reviewers what we think is an excellent reviewing process. Furthermore, we formulate our ideas about what it is that makes a review an excellent one. The title of this piece is deliberately ambiguous. It denotes that Creativity and Innovation Management strives for reviewing excellence—as in an excellent reviewing process. It also denotes that we reach for the stars and hope to one day receive and, hence, review only excellent submissions.

## KEYWORDS

constructive feedback, peer review, quality criteria, review process

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Reviewers are of quintessential importance for any journal, and Creativity and Innovation Management is no exception. Reviewing a paper is a collaborative process between the authors, the reviewers and the editors, aimed at polishing (and sometimes even discovering) the beauty of the paper. Although the reviewers are not to be regarded as co-authors, they play an important role in shaping the final paper. As

innovation and creativity scholars, we know that collaboration and the involvement of different areas of expertise contribute to the greater good and help create new and better things. Hence, the reviewing process plays a pivotal role in the development of any paper.

With this piece, we build on the thoughts of Frishammar and Thorgren (2018) in their paper ‘The telephone game, or clear as crystal? How to effectively craft responses to reviewer comments’, which looks at the reviewing process from an author's perspective.

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Frishammar and Thorgren point out that the review process is like a telephone game, a very complex information and knowledge exchange process. This process may be strenuous, sometimes even discouraging, but all participants need to bear in mind that the discussion between the authors and their reviewers is for the greater good of creating new and meaningful knowledge in the domains of Creativity and Innovation Management. Imai (1986, p. 74) once famously wrote: 'There can be no improvement where there are no standards'. With this piece, we aim to achieve two purposes. First, we want to help our reviewers and authors to better understand the reviewing process, from submission to final decision-making, and the roles and expectations of each party involved in the process—our authors, reviewers and (managing, associate and guest) editors. Second, we want to clarify the contributions each of them make throughout the process and particularly support our reviewers in giving constructive, elaborative, and developmental feedback.

This piece is structured according to the reviewing process. We give insight into each of the steps: the requirements we have for our authors when they submit their work, the role of the editorial assistant in the process, what the editors do next and what we expect from our reviewers.

## 2 | THE REVIEWING PROCESS

### 2.1 | Pre-review

Authors write a paper, and when they feel the paper is ready for it, they submit it to a journal. In the case of Creativity and Innovation Management, it is submitted through Manuscript Central, a widely used system to manage the submission and peer review of scientific papers.

The authors need to submit a range of additional material and information, including a cover letter to the editors, a title page, the lead author's and co-authors' names, affiliations and mail addresses. Furthermore, they need to specify the length of the paper (number of words), confirm that the paper is not submitted elsewhere, that the paper meets ethical and legal requirements and indicate whether the paper is a regular submission or intended for a special issue.

### 2.2 | Step 0—Initial screening and editor assignment

The editorial assistant checks whether the submission meets all these requirements and if the authors have followed all the author instructions in preparing the manuscript. If that is not the case, she unsubmitted the paper, notifies the authors and informs them of what they must do for the paper to pass the initial screening.

Furthermore, for papers that meet all the requirements, she looks at the 'Overall Similarity Index', that is, the plagiarism percentage generated by Similarity Check<sup>1</sup>, a functionality built into Manuscript

Central; flags the paper if that percentage is too high; checks if the paper is a first submission, a revision or a resubmission; and then assigns the paper to one of the editors.

We receive five types of submissions:

- Regular first submissions
- Submissions for a topical special issue
- Invited submissions for a conference special issue
- Revised manuscripts
- 'Reject & resubmit' manuscripts

Regular first submissions go to an editor whose profile best fits the topic of the paper, provided that s/he is not too much loaded already and there are no possible conflicts of interest—for example, as editors, we always stay out of papers written by direct colleagues or other authors we are somehow acquainted with.

Submissions for a topical special issue go to one of the managing editors plus a guest editor who then, with the rest of the guest editorial team, runs most of the reviewing process, that is, all the steps described below. The only deviation is that the guest editors do not make the final decision. Rather, they develop a recommendation for the managing editor assigned to the paper who, usually following the guest editor's recommendation, makes the final decision: accept, minor revision, major revision, reject & resubmit or reject.

Conference specials or, in most cases, conference special sections publish papers that have been presented at one of the conferences Creativity and Innovation Management is associated with and were invited to develop into a journal article. Currently, this concerns the Continuous Innovation Network (CINet) conference and the International Product Development Management (IPDM) conference.

Revised and 'reject & resubmit' papers go to the original managing, associate, guest or special issue editor.

### 2.3 | Step 1a—Triage<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.3.1 | Quick check for fit and plagiarism

The first thing an editor does is do a quick check if the paper fits the editorial scope of Creativity and Innovation Management by reading the abstract. If that feels promising, s/he checks the plagiarism percentage using Similarity Check.

In a future piece, we will go much deeper into our plagiarism policy. For now, it is enough to say that an overlap of less than around 10% usually passes, quotes and the list of references not included. A higher percentage will be scrutinized and may lead to a desk rejection decision.

If the paper does not fit our editorial scope or shows too much overlap with previous publications, it will be desk rejected—the so-called (desk) reject decision. This happens to approx. 45% of the submissions we receive (see Table 13).

### 2.3.2 | Check for importance, rigour and contribution

If the paper passes these checks, the editor looks at the paper in more detail. The level of detail may vary from reading some core sections diagonally to a complete and thorough read of the paper. S/he develops an impression of the paper, by looking at some or all of the following aspects:

- **Fit** to the scope of Creativity and Innovation Management, that is, to one of its former or current discourses, or the potential to open up a new discourse. One way to check this: does the list of references include relevant papers published in Creativity and Innovation Management, and are these references actively used in the argumentation developed in the paper?
- **Nature** of the paper, that is, is it based on empirical research or is it a conceptual paper (e.g., a literature review or a research agenda)? Creativity and Innovation Management rarely publishes conceptual papers, and if we do, the paper should address a 'hot' topic, which has been studied using a systematic literature review (or similar), rather than some eclectic selection of papers, is of outstanding quality and makes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of creativity and/or innovation management.
- **Importance.** Are there sufficient indications of the need, relevance and significance of the research question, problem or objective?
- **Rigour**
  - Does the *Theoretical Background* review, that is, discuss and problematize, all and only the theory relevant to the focal topic of the paper? Are the research questions or hypotheses logically linked to the literature review and formulated precisely? Is the domain of the study clear?
  - Is the *Research Design* section convincing? Does the sample fit the domain? Are the constructs operationalized properly? Do the overall methodological choices and the data collection and analysis methods reflect the research questions, hypotheses and model? Is the validity of the data and the analytical findings addressed? Does the research look replicable?
  - Does the *Discussion* section appear to do what it is supposed to do? See the next bullet.
- **Discussion.** The aim of the *Discussion* section is to compare and contrast the findings of the study presented in the paper with existing theory and/or practice to show what, where and how the paper adds to current theoretical and/or managerial understanding. A good discussion section is therefore laden with *references* to previous theory and, ideally, also practice.
- **Conclusion.** Does the *Conclusion* section present what looks like a *theoretical contribution*, or is it just a summary of what the authors did in the paper? Are *managerial implications* presented? Do the authors discuss the *limitations* of the study, *unexplainable findings* or *tentative explanations* and suggest *further research* based on that?
- **Quality of the communication.** Does the paper appear to be well-written? Are there few, if any, language issues (spelling, grammar,

phrasing)? What about the overall readability and the flow of the paper? Are the (qualitative) findings illustrated with, for example, quotes from interviews? Does the line of argumentation appear to be clear?

- **References.** Does the bibliography include the references one would expect to see considering the topic of the paper? Are not there too many local references written in a language our international readership does not master? Does the paper appear to link to one of the discourses going on in Creativity and Innovation Management?

Checking for these aspects typically takes no more than 20–30 minutes. Does the editor see a research question, objective or problem somewhere in the paper? Is the topic important for Creativity and Innovation Management and needed to advance the field of research and practice addressed in the paper? Is there a table with items in quantitative papers, or is there an appendix with questions asked in qualitative papers? Do terms such as reliability, validity/validation, verification and/or triangulation figure in the *Research Design* section? Does s/he see a table with research strings in a conceptual paper? Is there a *Discussion* section with ample references to previous theory and, ideally also, practice? Are there subsections suggesting that the paper formulates a theoretical contribution, managerial implications and limitations and further research? Is the majority of the references international, that is, written in English? Are there any references to discourses going on in Creativity and Innovation Management?

If the editor is not convinced of the quality nor the potential of the paper, s/he will reject it. If s/he is not convinced but sees potential, s/he may decide to reject the paper but invite a resubmission—the so-called *reject & resubmit* decision. Only if the editor is sufficiently convinced of the quality and the potential of the paper, s/he will send it out to reviewers. Occasionally, if the editor is in doubt, the paper is first discussed in the weekly meeting of the editorial team before a decision is made and sent out.

Table 1 summarizes who does what in the first part of the reviewing process.

### 2.4 | Step 2—Selecting reviewers

Finding reviewers is sometimes the hardest part of the whole process. In a high-quality and fast reviewing process, some important characteristics are in place. The following text directly addresses 'you', the (prospective) reviewer.

- **Quality**
  - The editor will try her/his best to match the paper with the research interests and reviewing experiences of potential reviewers, including research area(s) and method(s). This is mutually beneficial for the journal and yourself. The journal can make the best possible use of your core expertise and expect to receive expert evaluations of the paper. You are not bothered

**TABLE 1** Takeaways—Submission and initial screening (of first submissions).

| Step   | Action  | Responsible                         |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Pre-review                                     | Submission of the manuscript, cover letter to the editors, a title page, the lead author's and co-authors' names, affiliations mail addresses   | Authors                             |
| Step 0—Initial screening and editor assignment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have all the required documents and information been submitted? If not, the paper is unsubmitted, and the authors are asked to resubmit it with all the required documents and information</li> <li>• Flag high plagiarism percentage</li> <li>• Assignment to a managing and, for special issues, a guest editor</li> </ul>   | Editorial assistant                 |
| Step 1—Triage                                  | Check for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit with journal editorial scope</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Importance of the topic</li> <li>• Rigour</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations, further research</li> <li>• References</li> </ul> Possible decisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite reviewers</li> <li>• Reject &amp; resubmit</li> <li>• Desk reject</li> </ul> | Managing, associate or guest editor |

with papers that lie outside your interests or methodological scope. Furthermore, you are kept up to date with the latest work in your field. An additional benefit is that reviewing the work of others helps hone your own writing skills.

- Manuscript Central has a variety of ways to help the editors find reviewers. The system generates up to 30 Web of Science™ Reviewer Locator<sup>3</sup> suggestions. Furthermore, we can search for names of previous reviewers, authors or other individuals who we know would fit to the paper. Then, there is a function called 'Search for a companion paper', which helps us identify previous submissions addressing a similar topic and, through that, potential reviewers among the authors and the reviewers of these companion papers. Finally, we can search using keywords. This function finds reviewers whose previous submissions to or reviews for Creativity and Innovation Management have matching keywords and also checks against the keywords in the reviewers' profiles in Manuscript Central. If all this fails, we try other sources and, for example, ask a colleague in the editorial

team for names or go through the paper's list of references to identify authors who have written about a similar topic using a similar methodology.

Researchers move on in their careers. To reduce the likelihood that we miss suitable reviewers, it is important that you keep your profile in Manuscript Central up to date.

- It is inevitable that we occasionally select reviewers who are not entirely familiar or comfortable with the topic and/or the method—editors are not perfect or omniscient, Manuscript Central is not perfect and the information (e.g., manuscript keywords and reviewer profiles including their keywords) we work with is not always up to date. Sometimes we deliberately ask reviewers to review a paper knowing that they are specialized in the topic of, or the method employed in, the paper, but not in both. Please indicate any shortcomings you feel you have to the editors and in the review to the author(s).
- Speed
  - We urge our reviewers to respond quickly. Most invitees do so and either accept or decline in Manuscript Central. They are marked 'accepted' or 'declined' in the system. If you cannot do the review in the given time or do not feel comfortable with the paper, please indicate colleagues who might be a good alternative. Communicating to the editors that you do not feel comfortable with the topic or the methodology of the paper helps us pair you with future submissions. Unfortunately, some invitees react slower, if at all, which delays the reviewing process unnecessarily. They are reminded of the invitation 5 and 10 days after the first invitation. If they have not reacted 14 days after the first invitation, they are 'uninvited' by the system and marked 'auto-declined (no response)', forcing the editor to look for and invite alternative reviewers.
  - If you agree to do the review, we urge you to do the job within the indicated time frame, that is, *preferably 4 weeks* from acceptance. If it turns out that you need more time, please let us know so that we can communicate that to the authors. Furthermore, we can change your due date in Manuscript Central so that we are not annoying you with reminders.
  - If you decide to accept doing the review, it is important that you are aware that we expect you to stay with us throughout the life-cycle of a submission, that is, until the paper is accepted or rejected. There is nothing more disturbing and annoying for authors to receive feedback on their first submission from one pair of reviewers, do the job they are expected to do following the reviewers' feedback, submit the revision and then get feedback from one or two new reviewers with potentially entirely different views. Also, having to find new reviewers reduces the time effectiveness of the editor's job and leads to unnecessary delays.

Table 2 summarizes the reviewer selection process.

**TABLE 2** Takeaways—Selecting reviewers.

| Step                  | Action  | Responsible      |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|
| 2—Selecting reviewers | Find reviewers whose publication and/or reviewing profile fits the paper's topic and/or methodology   | Editor           |
|                       | Respond to the editor's invitation and do so quickly  | Invited reviewer |
|                       | Complete the job within the timeframe (4 weeks after acceptance). Inform the editor if you need an extension. Keep yourself available throughout the lifecycle of a submission. | Reviewer         |
| Throughout            | Keep your Manuscript Central profile updated  | Reviewer         |

## 2.5 | Step 3—The review

Once a reviewer accepts to do the review, the process is out of the editor's hands for a while.

### 2.5.1 | The overall process

Reviewers may do the job in different ways. Some start by reading the paper diagonally to develop a first overall impression. Others start at the top and end at the bottom of the manuscript, developing their review along the way. Yet, others do the same check the editors do and first:

- Look for an objective, problem, question, and assess the paper's importance.
- Search for indications of replicability (e.g., table of items or questionnaire in the appendix) and validity.
- Check if the *Discussion* section appears to do the job: compare and contrast with existing theory manifested in the form of references to previous publications.
- Read the *Conclusion* section to get an impression of the presence and the quality of the theoretical contribution, managerial implications, discussion of the limitations and suggestions for further research.
- Go through the *Bibliography* to see if the references one would expect to see, given the topic of the paper, are in the list and if the paper links to one or more discourses in Creativity and Innovation Management.

Some, then, put the manuscript aside for a while to digest what they have seen. Others go straight back to the paper and start developing their full review. Any approach is fine. Do the job in the way you feel most comfortable with.

### 2.5.2 | What do we ask our reviewers to look at?

We ask our reviewers to pay ample attention to a range of aspects. To help them, we put a list of these aspects in Manuscript Central. Table 3 shows the most salient details of the review form we receive as editors. In addition to filling in this form, there is also a function enabling reviewers to upload documents.

The *Review information* block of the review form the editors receive is generated by Manuscript Central. The *Review form* lists and provides some details on, seven points, which invite you to systematically address important aspects in your review. The *Recommendation* block asks you to give your recommendation. The *Comments* block gives you (1) the opportunity to give confidential comments to the editor (optional) and (2) feedback to the authors (required).

The way reviewers use the reviewer interface varies, and as editors, we do not have a preference: Anything goes. Many reviewers provide all the details of their feedback to the authors in the *Review form* blocks and write 'See above' in the *Comments* block. Others do it the other way around and insert some short statement in the *Review form* blocks with reference to the details in the *Comments* block. Yet, others do not write anything in the *Review form* blocks, one sentence in the *Comments* block (e.g., 'See my review'), and upload a document with their feedback to the authors unto the system.

The seven blocks in the *Review form* are the central part of any review. We go through them in more detail here.

#### *Originality and contribution*

Creativity and Innovation Management has the ambition to be the first-choice journal in its field. Our target audience includes both academic researchers and practitioners (managers, consultants) who do not look for trodden paths and panaceas. This requires that we publish top-quality high-impact papers that make a difference in the thinking about and acting on the management of creativity and innovation.

One important question concerns the extent to which the manuscript fits with the journal's mission. As mentioned before, this is one of the things we assess in our triage process. However, we also ask our reviewers to take a more detailed look. For that purpose, it is useful to read the mission of the journal (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14678691/homepage/productinformation.html>) as well as at least some of the editorials published by the editorial team. Editorials often highlight what editors find important to consider. Furthermore, we expect the reviewers to have at least a basic overall understanding of the kind, scope and quality level of the papers Creativity and Innovation Management publishes or, in other words, the discourses going on in the journal.

A paper's originality and contribution are developed in the course of the paper but are most visible in

- The *Introduction* section—in that section, typically half a page to one page long, we expect to see a compelling argument for the novelty and importance (need, relevance, significance) of the paper.

**TABLE 3** Excerpt of the Creativity and Innovation Management reviewer site—A stylized version of the editor's screen.

| Review information  |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| Reviewer name:  |                        |
| Reviewer affiliation  |                        |
| Manuscript ID:  |                        |
| Manuscript type:  |                        |
| Keywords:   |                        |
| Date submitted:   |                        |
| Manuscript title:   |                        |
| Date assigned:  |                        |
| Date review returned:   |                        |
| Review form   |                        |
| 1. Originality and Contribution: Does the paper contain information about theory and/or practice that is new and significant enough to justify publication? Is the paper relevant to the editorial scope of Creativity and Innovation Management and does it make a significant contribution to the subject area? To what extent does the paper relate to the discourse(s) going on in Creativity and Innovation Management? Is the paper based on a compelling argument, clearly showing the theoretical and practical need for, and the relevance of, the research reported in the paper? |                        |
| 2. Relationship to Literature and Previous Work: Does the paper discuss and, through that, demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature and previous work in the field? Does it cite appropriate and up to date literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?  |                        |
| 3. Methodology and Approach: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas on creativity and/or innovation management? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate? Is the research replicable?  |                        |
| 4. Results and Conclusions: Are the results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Are the results discussed against, i.e., compared and contrasted with, existing theory and/or practice and develop a clear understanding of what, where, how the research adds to current understanding? Are the conclusions clear and well formulated?   |                        |
| 5. Contribution to Academia: Does the paper identify clear implications for research and/or teaching? How can the paper be used in further research (contributing to the body of knowledge) and/or teaching creativity and/or innovation management? Does the paper identify directions for further research?   |                        |
| 6. Contribution to Practice: Does the paper identify clear implications for managers, policy makers and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact) and/or to influence public policy? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)?  |                        |
| 7. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of Creativity and Innovation Management's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, and acronyms? Is the length of the paper appropriate for the work it presents?  |                        |
| Req   | Recommendation         |
|   | Accept                 |
|   | Minor revision         |
|   | Major revision         |
|   | Reject & resubmit      |
|   | Reject                 |
| Comments  |                        |
| Confidential comments to the editor   |                        |
| Req   | Comments to the author |

- The *Theoretical Background* (Literature Review) section—here, that compelling argument is worked out in detail, and the nature of the study is argued for (gap, test, reconciliation, ...—see below).
- The *Discussion* section—in that section, the findings are compared and contrasted with existing theory and/or practice to show what, where and how the paper adds to current understanding.
- The *Conclusion* section—here, the theoretical contribution is articulated, ideally in the shape of a (partial) theory; managerial

implications are formulated; the limitations of the study are discussed; and directions for further research are suggested.

Table 4 shows what we expect to see in the different sections of a paper and lists some common pitfalls.

We cannot address all the possible discourses in our focal areas—we need to focus and stay up to date. This implies that even we, as editors, cannot say exactly which discourses we 'manage', which ones

**TABLE 4** Originality and contribution within the various sections.

| Section                                  | Expected content  | Common pitfalls   |
|--|---|---|
| Introduction                             | Compelling argument for the importance (practical and theoretical need, relevance, significance) of the paper and its anchoring in the literature   | Merely arguing for, or just indicating, a gap in the existing body of literature and not arguing for the need to cover the gap  |
| Theoretical background/literature review | The compelling argument is worked out in detail, and the nature of the study is argued for (gap, test, reconciliation, ...)   | Failing to review, i.e., discuss and <i>problematize</i> , existing theory<br>Creating a strawman by only presenting an eclectic selection of prior literature within the field   |
| Discussion                               | The findings are compared and contrasted with existing theory and/or practice to show what, where, how the paper actually adds to current understanding   | Repeating the findings or presenting an entirely empirical discussion rather than discussing the findings in the light of the theoretical background and developing the contribution based on that<br>Failure to (sufficiently) incorporate prior literature when highlighting the new insights of the paper  |
| Conclusion                               | The theoretical contribution is formulated, ideally in the shape of a (partial and actionable) theory<br>Managerial implications are formulated such that practitioners reading the paper 'on Sunday afternoon' can start implementing them 'on Monday morning'<br>Discussion of (1) findings that could not be explained or only tentatively so and (2) the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research based on these two categories | Summarizing the steps undertaken in the paper<br>No explicitly formulated theoretical contribution<br>Failure to help future researchers and practitioners to utilize the findings of the study<br>Presenting the managerial implications in an overly academic format that will not really help practitioners<br>Formulating 'interesting' venues for further research that are not or only weakly based in the research the paper is meant to contribute to |

are fading out or are on their way to come back and which new topics are emerging. The easy check we always do is going through the list of references to see if a paper goes back to some of our previous publications. We recommend our reviewers to do the same, in more detail, that is, to not only check *if* there are references to one of our discourses but also *how* these references are used—just for the sake of referencing, or do they play a central role in the debate unfolded in the paper?

Assessing the originality and contribution of a paper is difficult, even for the most experienced reviewers. Fortunately, helped by the work of others who have given 'contribution' ample thought, we can provide some help, though.

Perhaps the most important criterion here is 'importance'. Other, related, terms are 'need', 'relevance' and 'significance'. Some journals talk about 'novelty', but that is not enough in our view: A topic may be new; that is, it has never been researched before, but that does not necessarily make its study important. An example one of us regularly uses is that, as far as s/he knows, the impact of CEOs' breakfast habits on their performance during the day has never been researched—it would be a novel topic for a *management* journal. Important (for the management journal)? No. Nutritional scientists have done the job for us.

We regularly come across introductions in which the research presented in the paper is based on the assertion that 'this has not been researched before'. A growing number of our reviewers quite rightly note that this argument is not good enough.

The *Introduction* section is the place to develop a compelling argument for the importance of the paper—in the *Theoretical Background* section, the literature is reviewed, and the compelling argument is worked out in detail. Grant and Pollock (2011, pp. 873–874) formulate three key questions to be addressed in the Introduction:

- 'Who cares? An effective introduction captures attention and interest, making readers curious to read on ...
- What do we know, what don't we know, and so what? These questions identify the conversation (i.e., the discourse) that the study is joining, where the conversation has not yet gone, and why it should go there ...
- What will we learn? The answer to this question is given by providing a preview of [the paper's] ... contribution'.

Obviously, from an 'importance/need/relevance/significance' perspective, the 'so what' question is the most important one. Important aspects to be considered here are (inspired by Lee, 2004):

- The contribution goes beyond what we already know. Does the research take existing theory to another yet quite comparable domain or to a genuinely different domain? Have all the hypotheses been tested before, albeit it not in one paper?
- The contribution is large enough. Measuring the effects on one more performance indicators as a dependent variable or considering one more moderator does not usually add enough.



- The contribution is theory-based. This is a tricky one. A theory-based contribution is *not* one in which all the hypotheses conform to the theoretical background—that would imply that the contribution is not new. Theory-based rather means that the paper is built on a *critical review and problematization* of existing theory. We will expand on this aspect below.
- The contribution makes researchers and practitioners think differently about the topic of the paper—the paper changes, or adds to, their perspective.

**A theory-based contribution**—Creativity and Innovation Management is a management theory journal, focused on the development of creativity and innovation management theory, which is potentially useful for and usable by practitioners. That does not mean that all the papers we publish develop actionable theory—we are also interested

in more fundamental, ‘pre-actionable’ studies, as long as they give a strong impression that they provide a foundation for future actionable theory.

Christensen (2006) provides interesting insight into the ‘grand’ process of theory development. Consisting of two stages, the descriptive and the normative stage, the process starts with observing a phenomenon—this essentially involves developing the language needed, including defining the constructs, for the research community to be able to describe and communicate about the phenomenon in the first place. The second step involves classification in the form of a framework or a typology. In the third step, ‘researchers explore the association between the category-defining attributes of the [phenomenon] and the outcomes observed’ (p. 40) and produce ‘preliminary statements of correlation’ (p. 42). The second stage follows essentially ‘the same steps used in the descriptive stage’ (p. 43). The researchers

**TABLE 5** Types of research problems and expected methodological approaches.

| Type of research problem                                 | Characteristics   | Expected methodological approach   |
|--|---|--|
| Gap—‘terra incognita’                                    | Interestingly, the majority of papers we receive claim to identify some gap. In reality, however, creativity and innovation have been widely researched and are much richer in terms of theory development than, for example, operations management. So, most gaps identified in our submissions are gaps in the knowledge of the authors, not gaps as in ‘terra incognita’.  | Some form of qualitative (exploratory) research design.  |
| Contradiction  | Similar theories say contradictory things about the same empirical phenomenon. This is a much rarer proposition and an important but potentially also awkward one. One of the problems in all management disciplines is that we have no unified definitions and research methods. This means that we often produce different findings ‘simply’ due to differences in conceptualization, operationalization and/or methodology. The remedy for researchers: Do true replication studies, with the same constructs and operationalizations, i.e., use existing scales that have been validated in previous research, and the same data collection and analytical tools. | A more quantitative approach. Not only contradiction research but also theory testing and generalization studies benefit from using existing scales and ‘state-of-the-art’ research methods in order to prevent the generation of findings that are just different because the constructs have been operationalized differently and/or analysed differently. |
| Untested theory  | A lot, in spite of the theoretical richness of creativity and innovation management theory ... essentially all exploratory research produces tentative, i.e., untested theory formulated in the form of propositions for further research.  |  |
| Generalization   | Aimed at investigating the applicability of a theory beyond its current domain.   |  |
| Anomaly  | Essentially indicating an empirical phenomenon that does not fit the existing theory but can be explained using adjacent theory. U-shaped relationships could indicate the presence of an anomaly. See, e.g., Christensen (2006) for the importance of addressing anomalies in the ‘grand’ process of theory development.   | Typically requires abductive reasoning, ‘... a form of generative reasoning that begins with observing and confirming an anomaly, and generating and evaluating hunches that may explain the anomaly, for subsequent deductive constructing and inductive testing’ (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021: 684).  |
| Reconciliation   | Different theories say different things about the same empirical phenomenon. Combining these theories in a ‘grander’ theory and understanding their interplay help us develop a richer understanding of the phenomenon.   | Reconciliation studies may vary from conceptual work to empirical research.  |
| Design and, ideally, test of a tool, method, system, ... | Such papers are relatively rare in Creativity and Innovation Management, but they do occur once in a while.   | The use of Design Thinking/Design Science in such research is increasingly popular.  |

continue observing, describing and measuring the phenomenon and start categorizing situations that yield different results. Whenever they encounter an anomaly, researchers go back to one of the previous steps. In the course of the process, the theory on the phenomenon may become contingency-sensitive; that is, researchers start making ‘contingent statements of causality—to show how and why the causal mechanism results in a different outcome in different situations’ (p. 43).

For reviewers, it is important to understand where the research presented in the paper is in the process of theory development. For example:

- Is it in the very early stages of exploring a new phenomenon and proposing how to describe and measure the phenomenon? Assessing importance is difficult at this stage. Much depends on the editor's and reviewer's insight into broad societal, industrial, economic or technological trends or even ‘gut feeling’.
- Is the theory already so well developed that contingent statements of causality can be tested?

Research focused on either of these extremes and any intermediate state of theory development can be important. Key questions, in any case, are: Is the research question large enough, is the study theory-based, as in the meaning outlined above, does the research have the potential to change other researchers' and/or practitioners' minds?

Another important categorization is based on the type of research question addressed in the paper. One categorization<sup>4</sup> distinguishes the following types of research needs, based on the literature review presented in the paper (Table 5):

Your job as a reviewer is to understand the type of research question, address its importance and, particularly, check its validity and replicability. Is the gap proposed actually a gap, and is the claim that the focal theory of the paper has not been tested yet indeed justified? Together with your own theoretical baggage, the theoretical background (see next) provides important clues. Furthermore, you are expected to assess the extent to which the research problem, the methodological approach deployed and the contribution developed in the paper are consistent with each other.

#### *Relationship to literature and previous work*

The relationship to the literature is typically shown in the *Theoretical Background* (Literature Review) section.

To assess this criterion, we often rely entirely on our reviewers. Unless you have been invited solely for your methodological know-how, you have been approached *because* of your expertise in the topic addressed in the paper—expertise evidenced through your publication list, the keywords in your reviewer profile and the reviews you did for us in the past. So, we expect you to be sufficiently or even fully familiar with the relevant literature and able to assess whether the paper demonstrates an adequate understanding of the relevant literature and previous work in the field and if the work truly relates to one of the discourses in our journal, whether any significant work is ignored and if the literature is cited appropriately.

#### *Methodology and approach*

**Rigour**—The keyword here is rigour, independent of the type of research. ‘Rigor can be defined as the degree to which research methods are scrupulously and meticulously carried out in order to recognize important influences occurring in the process of conducting the research. It is a set of standards investigators use to evaluate the quality, trustworthiness, and value of research’ (Liu, 2017, p. 1511). Although, in our minds, rigour does not only pertain to method—working meticulously is equally relevant for the literature review, the discussion of the findings and the formulation of theoretical and managerial implications—we focus on methodological rigour here.

It is not the aim of this piece to write a methodological guideline. Methodologically speaking, the variety of papers we receive goes far beyond what we find in any methodological textbook. We assume that our reviewers are champions in their field of research and its methods. We rely on their views but have some overall requirements.

The wide majority of the papers we receive fall into one of three broad categories: quantitative studies, qualitative studies and conceptual studies. The exact nature and measures of rigour *partly* depend on the type of research.

- Quantitative studies use analytical tools such as SPSS, R or Stata. These tools have a range of in-built tests to evaluate a huge variety of statistical properties, not only including a range of validities and indicators of reliability but also factor loadings, collinearity, ... you name it. Reporting that all the tests that are relevant given the research reported in a paper have actually been conducted showcases the rigour of the paper.
- Qualitative studies using, for example, case study or action research, do not have such software-based support and rely on triangulation to assess data validity, and verification to assess the validity of analytical findings. Authors should convince their readership that these quality checks have been done adequately.

We expect our reviewers to check the extent to which a paper assigned to them accounts for and reports the tests and checks one would expect to see in the paper and that the paper arrives at trustworthy findings. The traditional labels used to measure trustworthiness vary between quantitative and qualitative research, but they essentially mean the same—see Table 6.

- Conceptual papers are usually based on some form of literature review. Creativity and Innovation Management does publish such papers, provided that they address a ‘hot’ topic and are really well done, that is, based on a systematic literature review or similar (e.g., Jesson et al., 2011; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003), rather than some eclectic selection of papers, and are of outstanding quality. Here, indicators of research quality include the databases used to search for publications, the extent to which the search strings operationalize the constructs addressed in the study, the account for the inclusion and exclusion criteria used and the coding process.

**TABLE 6** Trustworthiness in quantitative and qualitative research (categorization based on Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

| Quantitative research | Qualitative research | Indicative description   |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Internal validity     | Credibility          | The confidence the researcher <i>has</i> and the reader <i>can have</i> (!!) in the truth of the research findings. Future researchers will only be inclined to build their work on internally valid/credible studies. |
| External validity     | Transferability      | The degree to which the results of the research can be transferred to similar situations or populations with other respondents.  |
| Reliability           | Dependability        | The extent to which other researchers repeating the research would obtain the same findings.   |
| Objectivity           | Confirmability       | The degree to which the findings of the study could be confirmed by other researchers as they are based on data and observations rather than reflective of bias or personal motives.                                   |

**Operationalization and sampling**—Quality indicators that are not or less dependent on the type of research include operationalization and sampling (sampling criteria). Again, it is not the purpose of this piece to write a methodological guideline, so we do not go into, for example, all kinds of sampling strategies, but rather focus on the importance of reporting and *accounting* for the data collected for the purpose of the paper (replicability) and the sample from which the data is collected (sampling).

*Replicability* is a great but often overlooked good in scientific research and therefore an important aspect for reviewers to pay attention to. At the end of the day, all research is ‘just’ a small step in any ‘grand’ theory development process. So, researchers want to build on the work of previous researchers and wish future researchers to build on their own research. Publishing irreplicable research affects not only an author’s h-factor but also the journal’s impact factor negatively.

Replicability requires that the operationalization of the constructs and variables used in any study we publish are reported and accounted for in sufficient detail.

- Quantitative researchers using a survey to collect data have it relatively easy—they ‘simply’ report, in a table, the items they used to measure their constructs and variables, usually together with the factor loadings of the items, and the Average Variance Extracted and the Cronbach’s Alpha or Composite Reliability of the constructs.
- Qualitative researchers are expected to report their operationalizations, too. Some qualitative studies can start from a well-defined protocol (with ex-ante operationalizations). Others need to be much more ‘grounded’ and involve the development of language

and the definition of constructs. In such cases, only the study’s ex-post operationalizations can be reported. However, irrespective of their starting point, we expect our authors to report their interview questions, and the data and information they looked for, ex-ante, or found, ex-post, in the observations they made in, for example, meetings, workshops and factory visits, and in the company documents they studied. Without such information, future researchers cannot replicate the study, nor can they assess the quality of the data underpinning the contribution developed in the paper or follow the argumentation developed in the paper in detail.

**Sampling**—Reporting the sampling criteria and strategy used in the research affects the representativeness of the study but does more than that. Sampling may concern a variety of levels in one and the same study. A study may, for example, be focused on one or more types of respondents, from only micro, small and medium-sized or large firms or all sizes of firms, representing one or several industries, in one or more countries, with similar or different cultures or levels of economic development, on one or more continents. Thus, sampling defines, among others, the domain of the theory proposed in the paper. It also sets some of its limitations and may generate a generalization opportunity or even need.

It is therefore important that our reviewers check if the authors are sufficiently aware of this, that is, if they report their sampling criteria and sample, if the sample is sufficiently representative, if the conclusions they draw are not overly generalized and if there are suggestions for further research aimed at generalization or further contextualization of the theory developed in the paper.

### Results and conclusion

The aim of this block is to help reviewers develop an overall assessment of the contribution made in the paper (blocks 5 and 6 dig deeper into the theoretical and practical contribution, respectively). Key items to be checked here include the clarity and appropriateness of the analysis presented in the *Analysis* section, the rigour of the *Discussion* section and the formulation of the conclusion.

We expect all the papers we publish to develop an important contribution to theory. That contribution is developed in the *Discussion* section, in which the findings of the study presented in the *Analysis* section are compared and contrasted with existing theory in order to show what, where, how the paper adds to current understanding. A good discussion is therefore laden with references to previous publications and contains sentences such as:

- ‘This finding confirms ...’.
- ‘This result goes against our hypothesis that .... One possible explanation could be ...’.
- ‘This finding sheds additional light on ...’.

In the *Conclusion* section, the theoretical contribution is formally formulated, ideally in the shape of a (partial and, ideally, actionable) theory. Furthermore, we expect to see suggestions for further research based on the *limitations* of the study and *unexplainable findings* or

*tentative explanations.* Finally, that section should include implications for managers and, if appropriate, other practitioners such as consultants, educators or policymakers.

#### *Contribution to academia*

According to Doty and Glick (1994, p. 233) (see also, e.g., Dubin, 1969; Whetten, 1989), a (good contribution to) theory meets three criteria: '(a) the constructs must be identified, (b) relationships among these constructs must be specified, and (c) these relationships must be falsifiable'. Referring to Dubin (1969), Meredith et al. (1989, p. 303) note that 'a theory must include the interrelationships between its variables and/or attributes as well as some criteria that define its boundaries. The theory must also improve our understanding of the non-unique phenomenon or help us make predictions about it'. In other words, we should expect to see the contribution formulated in terms of its constructs and the relationships between them, explanations of the relationships and the domain in which the theory is proposed to hold. For explorative research, we suggest, following, for example, Yin (1984), to formulate the contribution as a tentative theory in the form of an, ideally, cohesive set of researchable propositions.

If the contribution is formulated as a (tentative) theory and provided that the study is replicable, valid and reliable, the usability of the paper for further research on, and in the teaching of, creativity and/or innovation management is inherently clear.

In view of the 'grand' process, a second important contribution to academia concerns the discussion of the *limitations* of the study and proposals for *further research*. Some authors formulate what they *think* would be interesting for further research. We are not necessarily interested in such suggestions but are rather keen to see suggestions that follow naturally from the research presented in the paper.

There are two major sources for further research. One is unexpected findings, for example, results going against one of the hypotheses. Such results are identified in the *Results* section, discussed in the *Discussion* section and perhaps provided with a good but tentative explanation. Tentative explanations are a source for testing-oriented research. If no explanation can be found, further research is typically exploratory in nature. Another source for further research concerns the domain of the contribution developed, for example, one or a few industries, large firms only or one or two countries with similar cultural and economic development profiles. Further research should typically be aimed at generalizing the theory developed in the paper beyond these limitations.

#### *Contribution to practice*

A short (litmus) test for this quality criterion is: Do the practical implications have practical value, and are they actionable, that is, contain sufficient detail and sense of direction so that a practitioner reading the implications for practice 'on Sunday afternoon' can start preparing for their implementation 'on Monday morning'?

A more elaborate test could follow the criteria for a managerially relevant contribution from De-Margerie and Jiang (2011, p. 127).

Referring to a range of other authors, they propose that a theory must be:

- Descriptively relevant, that is, 'accurately describe phenomena that practitioners actually experience'.
- Goal relevant, that is, 'address something practitioners care about and want to influence'.
- Operationally valid, that is, 'specify levers that practitioners can actually manipulate'.
- 'Non-obvious and interesting'.
- Timely, that is, 'help practitioners deal with their pressing problems'.
- Readable and understandable, that is, '... synthesized and translated into a language that is understood by practitioners'.
- Implementable, that is, 'implications are prescribed in a manner that could be put to use in practice to exploit an opportunity or to resolve a problem'.
- Stimulating critical thinking, that is, the contribution challenges the practitioners' 'causal assumptions, identify emerging trends, structural changes or paradigms [or] has the potential to enhance or restructure the mental models managers apply in their practice'.

We invite our reviewers to assess the papers assigned to them through the lens of these criteria—they pertain to the paper as a whole but, of course, especially the implications formulated in the *Conclusion* section: Are they descriptively and goal relevant, specific and timely, understandable and implementable, stimulating?

#### *Quality of communication*

Whereas the previous six features are linked to one or a few sections, communication concerns the whole paper. This criterion addresses not only the technical writing quality but also the quality of the messaging developed in the paper.

Correct writing concerns spelling, grammar, syntax and meeting the journal standards regarding, for example, table and figure captions and the referencing style in the body text and in the bibliography. If the paper is poorly written, you should note that and either suggest that the authors 'seek assistance from an experienced, professional, preferably native English-speaking, language editor' (a sentence one of the editors uses fairly routinely) or refer to Wiley Editing Services (<https://wileyeditingservices.com/en/>).

Ensuring a high-quality message however requires more than just using the technical language of the field but also an understanding of the (expected) knowledge of Creativity and Innovation Management's readership, clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use and acronyms, and an appropriate length of the paper relative to the work it presents: each word, sentence, paragraph, subsection and section has a message—is that message clear, well-worded and well-structured, and formulated without excessive use of words, jargon and acronyms?

Last but not least, the title, abstract and keywords need attention. Now that most authors start their research with some form of

literature search, all papers that are relevant to their study need to be found—this is of interest for the authors' h-index and all journals' impact factor, including our own. Once a paper has been identified to be of potential interest to the researcher, they usually check the title, abstract and the keywords first, to determine whether they should read the whole paper.

The *title* is, perhaps not surprising, an aspect most authors hardly pay attention to. Yet, it is critical that they do and, thus, for reviewers important to consider, too. Titles need to be concise—not too long, not too complex, attractive and accurately reflect what the paper is about. Some authors are inclined to give their papers attractive but rather far-fetched titles. This is interesting but reduces the chances that the paper is found by future authors working on the same kind of topic.

The *keywords* should accurately capture the essence of the research presented in the paper but (1) not repeat words from the title and (2) be concise. Repeating words from the title is not productive, that is, does not add any value. Conciseness means that the keyword consists of one, maximum two words, not of three or more words. Here again, keywords are crucial in the early stages of any literature search. The more informative the set of keywords, the easier the paper will be found. As a reviewer, providing feedback on the keywords is therefore of utter importance. So, please check if keywords are used that you expect will trigger creativity and/or innovation management scholars and also if one or two of the keywords refer to the chief method(s) used in the paper.

Finally, Creativity and Innovation Management does not use a so-called structured *abstract*—the abstract is free text. A good abstract reflects the key nature of the paper and does so accurately. It does not oversell nor undersell the paper. It pays attention to the research problem and its importance, the chief methodologies employed in the research and the theoretical and practical contributions developed in, as well as the limitations of, the paper.

Table 7 summarizes the aspects we ask our reviewers to scrutinize.

**TABLE 7** Takeaways—The review.

| Step   | Action   | Responsible |
|--|--|-------------|
| 4—The review: What do we ask our reviewers to look at? | <p>Evaluate the submission in terms of the seven criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Originality and contribution               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Importance (need, relevance, significance)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relationship to literature and previous work</li> <li>• Methodology and approach               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Rigour: replicability, validity, reliability</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Results and conclusions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Discussion</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contribution to academia               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Shaped as a theory: constructs, relationships, explanation, domain</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contribution to practice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Actionability</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Quality of communication               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Technical writing</li> <li>◦ Messaging</li> <li>◦ Title, keywords, abstract</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Reviewer    |

### 2.5.3 | How to be a constructive reviewer

While these seven points consider, if you like, the *technical part* of the review process, and are meant to help you structure your review and cover all the major criteria underpinning your final recommendation, another important aspect is your role and way of communicating in the process.

The whole process from the authors writing and submitting the manuscript, through the review process to the final decision, reject or accept and publish, is the beginning of a discourse between the authors and the academic and practitioner communities. As a reviewer, you represent the academic community, together with one of the journal editors. This implies that there is also an important role for you to play in the *communication part* of the reviewing process.

Imagining that you are on the receiving end of your review is perhaps the best starting point to address this part. What would you like to see in reviews of your own work? The answer:

- Critical but constructive feedback
- Structure
- Timely response

**Critical but constructive feedback**—There is nothing against being critical, on the contrary. But always aim at providing critique, not criticism. As one website discussing critique and criticism in a reviewing context puts it, ‘**Criticism** is personal, destructive, vague, inexpert, ignorant, and selfish’, whereas ‘**Critique** is impersonal, constructive, specific, expert, informed and selfless’ (Seager, 2018). Table 6 provides some more detail (Table 8).

Good reviewers put their personalities aside and use their expertise to help authors improve their paper. They are not focused on the messengers, that is, the authors, but on the work they deliver. They are concrete and precise in their observations and recommendations. They identify weaknesses and even deficiencies in the paper but argue why the issues they raise concern weaknesses and how they

**TABLE 8** The differences between critique and criticism (based on Irandoust, 2006; Seager, 2018).

| Critique   | Criticism   |
|--|---|
| Expertise-based  | Personality-based                                 |
| Constructive   | Destructive                                       |
| Concrete and specific                                      | Vague and general                                 |
| Paper-focused  | Author-focused                                    |
| Focuses on what is working (but can or should be improved) | Focuses on what is lacking                        |
| Asks for clarification                                     | Condemns what the criticaster does not understand |
| Looks at potential   | Finds fault                                       |

can be dealt with. If they see something they do not understand, they do not write ‘I have no clue what you mean’ but ask ‘Can you please explain ...’. Above all, they look for potential. No first submission is perfect, and even papers accepted for publication are rarely perfect.

**The structure of the review**—If reviewers submit a separate review, we see them ranging from reviews focusing on minor issues only, with none of the comments actually being of a critical character, to reviews focusing on one or two major points and leading to a recommendation to reject the paper when these issues are considered irreparable or far too extensive work to be dealt with in a revision. Most reviews, however, contain both major and minor issues. Organizing your review accordingly is really helpful for both the editor and the authors to understand your final recommendation. When organizing between major and minor issues and concerns, we recommend numbering your feedback, as this provides a good structure for the author(s) to respond explicitly to each issue and concern raised by the reviewer.

Furthermore, if you do not use the seven-point form or only use that screen to summarize your feedback, we recommend that you pay attention to each of the seven points in your review anyway. They represent the most important qualities of a good academic publication, which most journals use in one form or another.

Some reviewers start with the major issues, organized according to the seven points, and then take the minor issues section by section. Others take a section-by-section approach throughout. As editors, we do not have a strong preference as long as you provide a clear structure. Frishammar and Thorgren (2018, p. 241), in their paper on responding to reviewers, suggest that ‘the response letter is structured by a copy and paste of each reviewer comment, in the order that the comments appeared in the ... review. Responses to the comments should either appear beneath each comment ... or be presented in a table with two columns, where the left column lists a comment in each cell and the right column presents the response to that comment’.

The better you organize your comment, the easier it is for the authors to deal with them and the more effective the (double-blind) discussion between you and the authors.

**TABLE 9** Takeaways—The reviewer.

| Step  | Action   | Responsible |
|---|--|-------------|
| 4—The review: How to be a constructive reviewer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide critical but constructive feedback, i.e., critique, do not criticize</li> <li>• Structure your review, e.g.:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The seven points one by one</li> <li>◦ Section by section</li> <li>◦ Major and minor issues, preferably numbered</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop and submit your review on time</li> </ul> | Reviewer    |

**Timely response**—All authors, including yourself, appreciate speedy feedback. Speed is especially important for PhD students if their thesis is article-based and for early-career academics, who have to build up a publication record and achieve a good h-index to be considered for the next step in their careers. Furthermore, we live in a fast-moving world—the data we collected yesterday may be outdated tomorrow. (Other) researchers and particularly practitioners are obviously most interested in ‘the latest’ (Table 9).

## 2.5.4 | Your recommendation

Before you submit your review, we recommend that you go through your comments and check if all the issues you feel you should raise are addressed and that the ‘tone’ of the feedback is in order—how would you react if you received the review you are about to submit?

Having done that, the last thing to do is that you tick one of the *Recommendation* boxes. Make sure that your recommendation is consistent with your comments.

- **Reject**—Recommending a rejection is definitely in place if the paper is uninteresting, too poorly written, the data have fatal flaws, the data and method lack rigour and the paper offers little possibility to develop an important enough contribution or contains one or more fatal errors.
- **Reject & resubmit**—If you see a lot of major and minor issues but feel that the overall idea is promising, all issues you raise have the potential to be repairable but require some further analysis, the collection of additional data, a significant repositioning and rewrite of the theoretical background or the discussion section, actions that the authors are unlikely to be able to complete in the 2 months they are usually given for a major revision, you should recommend a reject & resubmit.
- **Major revision**—If you see a lot of major and minor issues but you feel that (1) the paper is promising, (2) all the issues you raise are repairable and (3) the authors should be able to revise the paper in the 2 months they are given, we recommend suggesting a major revision.

- **Minor revision**—A minor revision is appropriate when there are no major issues with the paper and the list of minor issues is limited. Authors are allowed 1 month to develop a minor revision.
- **Accept**—If you see no issues whatsoever, accepting the paper is the obvious recommendation.

Push the button and the paper is off your desk for now. It goes back to the editor in charge of the paper (through the editorial assistant).

**TABLE 10** Criteria to rate the reviewers' feedback.

| Timeliness         |                             |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3                  | Review was on time          |
| 2                  | Review was slightly delayed |
| 1                  | Review was severely delayed |
| Quality assessment |                             |
| 3                  | Review was highly relevant  |
| 2                  | Review was sufficient       |
| 1                  | Review was below average    |

**TABLE 11** The reviewers' recommendations and the editor's usual decision.

| Reviewer 1        | Reviewer 2        | Most likely stage                                   | The editor's usual decision  |
|-------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Accept            | Accept            | After 2–4 revisions                                 | Accept   |
| Accept            | Minor revision    | After 2–3 revisions                                 | Accept or minor revision, depending on the reviewers' comments                                 |
| Accept            | Major revision    | After 1–2 revisions                                 | Minor or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments <sup>a</sup>                     |
| Accept            | Reject & resubmit | After 1–2 revision                                  | Reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments <sup>a</sup>         |
| Accept            | Reject            | After the first submission or the first revision    | Reject, reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments <sup>a</sup> |
| Minor revision    | Minor revision    | After 2–3 revisions                                 | Minor revision   |
| Minor revision    | Major revision    | After 1–2 revisions                                 | Minor or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments                                  |
| Minor revision    | Reject & resubmit | After 1–2 revisions                                 | Reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments <sup>a</sup>         |
| Minor revision    | Reject            | After the first submission or the first revision    | Reject, reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments <sup>a</sup> |
| Major revision    | Major revision    | After the original submission or the first revision | Major revision   |
| Major revision    | Reject & resubmit | After the first submission                          | Reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments                      |
| Major revision    | Reject            | After the first submission                          | Reject, reject & resubmit or major revision, depending on the reviewers' comments              |
| Reject & resubmit | Reject & resubmit | After the first submission                          | Reject & resubmit  |
| Reject & resubmit | Reject            | After the first submission                          | Reject or reject & resubmit, depending on the reviewers' comments                              |
| Reject            | Reject            | After the first submission                          | Reject   |

<sup>a</sup>When the reviewers' opinions are widely different, the editor will read the paper her/himself in detail and/or invite the views of a third reviewer or an associate editor.

## 2.6 | Step 4—The editor's post-review decision-making

Once we have received two, occasionally three reviews, the editorial assistant notifies the editor through a Manuscript Central generated mail.

First, s/he goes through the reviews, reads them in detail and also rates the reviewers' performance, using the Manuscript Central interface shown in Table 10.

We use these ratings for two purposes. First, it makes it easier for us to find reviewers who deliver good quality reviews and do so timely. Second, we use these scores to identify candidates for the annual CIM Best Reviewer Award (see, e.g., <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14678691>).

Sometimes, the decision for the editor is really easy and quick and sometimes rather difficult and time-consuming. Table 11 sketches the different situations the editor may encounter and the decision s/he usually makes in each of these situations. Obviously, the most difficult situations are those in which the reviewers arrive at nearly or entirely opposite recommendations. In such cases, the editor virtually

does a third review her/himself and/or calls upon a third reviewer or one of the associate editors for advice.

Eventually, however, the editor reaches a decision, and s/he informs the authors accordingly by mail, with a bcc to you, and also sends you a separate 'thank you' mail.

The *accept* mail the editor sends out is usually the Manuscript Central generated version.

The *minor* or *major revision* mail the editor sends out can be the standard mail generated by Manuscript Central, which includes the reviewers' comments from the review form (Table 3) and/or the reviewer's separate review document. In many cases, however, the editor will add some text, highlighting and/or reemphasizing the reviewers' main comments, drawing attention to one or two particularly important points, taking position if the reviewers differ in their opinions and also adding her/his own views, for example, on issues s/he feels the reviewers have overlooked. The mail also stipulates that the authors should develop a separate and anonymous Word file, to be submitted as a supplementary file, describing in detail what the authors did with the reviewers' and the editor's comments. Major revisions are given 2 months; minor revisions 1 month. In both cases, the authors may ask for an extension. If they do not and deliver late, the submission will be regarded as a new one.

The *reject & resubmit* mail rejects the manuscript but opens for the possibility to submit a new manuscript. If it concerns a *desk reject & resubmit*, the editor formulates a set of guidelines providing the authors with some sense of direction on the improvements they are proposed to make. If the reject & resubmit decision is based on reviewer inputs, the editor usually refers to the reviews, highlights what s/he feels are the major issues and may add some of her/his own concerns and expectations.

Finally, the *reject* mail says formulates the main reasons for rejection, for example, no fit to the journal or potentially good topic but poorly written, no rigour, no (good) discussion section and insufficient contribution. The mail ends on an encouraging note, expressing the hope that the rejection of this manuscript will not discourage the authors from the submission of future manuscripts. If the rejection is due to plagiarism by the authors, the mail may be less polite and is certainly not inviting.

### 3 | THE REVISION PROCESS

The authors who received a minor or major revision or a reject & resubmit decision may decide to accept the decision or opt out. Some authors respond, thank the editor and the reviewers and promise they will take up the challenge and deliver the revision on time. The majority, however, do not react. Their response is hidden in the future and may even never reach the editors—they submit a revision, resubmit or never come back.

All revisions and resubmissions go through all the processes outlined above:

- Step 0—Initial screening and editor assignment by the editorial assistant

Irrespective of the type of submission—resubmission or revision, the manuscript ends up with the same editor, in the 'Awaiting triage' list for resubmissions or in the 'Awaiting Managing Editor Decision' for revisions. The editor then goes through:

- Step 1a—Triage (resubmissions) or step 1b—Managing editor decision (revisions)
- Step 2—Selecting reviewers

The editor will normally select the same reviewers who were involved in the original submission and, for an R2, R3, ..., in previous revisions. The reviewers have at least some recollection of the paper, receive the authors' responses to their own and the other reviewer's comments and, in many cases, a manuscript with the main changes highlighted by, for example, using a different font colour.

The manuscripts we publish have usually gone through at least two revisions. In that case, the total process consists of the first submission, most likely getting a major revision decision, an R1 with a minor revision decision and the R2 getting accepted. Very rarely are first submissions or even R1s accepted. Very rare, too, are R5s. Tables 12 and 13 show some important statistics.

We ask our reviewers to deliver their review no later than 4 weeks (28 days) after accepting the invitation. With 30.7 days, they do an excellent job for the original submissions and deliver their reviews of major and minor revisions after, on average, 22.0 days, well within our target.

As editors, we seem to do a much less effective job. Be aware, though, that we do not always get the first two reviewers we invite to accept the job. We give invitees 14 days to react before their status changes from 'invited' to 'auto-declined (no response)' and remind them 5 and 10 days after the invitation mail has been sent. In other words, the average of 29.7 days reflects the fact that we need to

**TABLE 12** Creativity and Innovation Management turnaround and reviewer assignment times (as per 30 June 2022).

| Journal statistics                            | Prior 12 months | Target         |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| Avg. reviewer turnaround time (days)—original | 30.7            | 28             |
| Avg. reviewer turnaround time (days)—revision | 22.0            | 28             |
| Avg. time to assign reviewer (days)—original  | 29.7            | 7              |
| Avg. time to assign reviewer (days)—revision  | 7.0             | 5              |
| Avg. days from submission to final decision   | 78.9            | - <sup>a</sup> |

<sup>a</sup>We cannot set a target here as the total turnaround time depends on the number of revisions.



**TABLE 13** Type and decisions made on manuscripts submitted in 2021 (as of 30 June 2022).

| Type of manuscript   | # submissions | First decision | Percentage | Current status | Percentage |
|--|---------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Regular submissions  | 351           |                |            |                |            |
| Special issue submissions                                      | 44            |                |            |                |            |
| Decision   |               |                |            |                |            |
| Accept   |               | 1 <sup>a</sup> | 0.3        | 28             | 7.1        |
| Minor or major revision  |               | 77             | 19.5       | 40             | 10.1       |
| Rejected & resubmit  |               | 64             | 16.2       | 0              | 0.0        |
| Reject <sup>b</sup>  |               | 76             | 19.2       | 327            | 82.8       |
|  |               | 218            | 55.2       |                |            |
| Desk reject at triage  |               |                |            |                |            |
| • Due to plagiarism  |               | 50             | 12.7       | 0              | 0.0        |
| • Due to insufficient fit or contribution, poorly written, ... |               | 127            | 32.2       | 0              | 0.0        |
|  |               | 177            | 44.8       |                |            |
| Total  | 395           | 395            | 100%       | 395            | 100%       |

<sup>a</sup>This concerns a guest editorial, which was checked before its submission to Manuscript Central.

<sup>b</sup>After revision 1 or, albeit it rarely, revision 2.

invite some four (and sometimes many more) reviewers per original submission. We find that acceptable. As we try to use the same reviewers for revisions, hoping that they accept to review revisions of the original submissions assigned to them within 5 days, the 7.0 days that takes in practice is also acceptable.

#### 4 | SOME STATISTICS ON THE SUBMISSIONS AND THE EDITORIAL DECISIONS MADE

Table 13 shows that we received 351 regular and 44 topical or conference special issue submissions in 2021. As per 30 June 2022, 28 (7.1%) of these manuscripts had been accepted, 40 (10.1%) papers were still in the pipeline and 327 (82.8%) papers had been rejected either at triage (177, 44.8%) or after the first review round (150, 38.0%). If we would generalize that picture, we eventually accept around 17% of the papers submitted and reject about 83%. Fortunately, this is rather favourable compared with other journals, which 'pride' themselves with rejection rates of over 95%.

Our perspective is that rejection is part of the game, not 'the name of the game'. We are in the business of publishing the work submitted to us, helping our authors to get published indeed and strive for reviewing excellence for the purpose of that.

Finally, note that 50 (12.66%) of the 2021 submissions were rejected due to plagiarism. This is an increasing concern for all journals to which we will devote a separate piece later on. Although we have very good support from Similarity Check, inappropriate papers can and do slip through our scrutiny. In 2021, we had such a case in which one of the reviewers wrote to us saying that s/he had seen a very similar paper before. Indeed. The editor still remembers this as one of

the worst cases of plagiarism s/he has ever seen. The paper has slipped through as it had been published in a journal not covered by Similarity Check. We hope that our reviewers are very alert to any suspicious cases and notify us.

#### 5 | CONCLUDING REMARKS—TOWARDS CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

The name of the academic game is 'publish or perish'. This holds for researchers and for journals just as much. Lee (2004) puts it quite nicely: Journals are in the business of publishing research, not of rejecting it. If authors do not publish, they perish. If journals do not publish, they perish, too.

Creativity and Innovation Management wants to publish the manuscripts submitted to us, provided that the submissions meet our focus and quality standards. Authors want us to publish their work in our journal, provided that we meet their focus and quality standards. Being a journal focused on Creativity and Innovation Management, we are and should be open to emerging topics and (grand) challenges surfacing among firms and in society at large. The journal should be famously curious about creative and innovative phenomena, approaches and methods. A long-standing phrase within the editorial team is that impact is more important than impact factor—and that the significance of the published papers is more important than (the number of) significance stars. Nevertheless, curiosity and openness should not go at the expense of the highest academic standards.

This balancing act is also reflected in the selection of reviewers. They play a crucial role in our decision-making and have a pivotal role to play in our ambition to publish both rigorous and relevant papers.

Without our reviewers, we could not exist. Many reviewers, however, are not fully aware of what is happening behind the screens. One aim of this paper is therefore to lift the veil and provide detailed insight into the reviewing process.

It is rare that the submissions we receive are entirely in sync with our expectations. The aim of the reviewing process is to synchronize the focus and quality of the manuscript with our focus and quality standards. We need top-quality reviewers for that purpose, reviewers who are willing and able to do a job they fully understand. The second aim of this paper, therefore, is to outline what we think is a top-quality reviewing process—a transparent process with high and clear standards evolving as a discourse between authors and reviewers and editors, that is, the representatives of the creativity and innovation management community in that process.

Finally, a journal like ours is never even close to the end of its life-cycle. Creativity and Innovation Management as fields of theory and practice will always evolve. New discourses will emerge hand-in-hand with new practices and technologies. We will continue reaching for the stars—be the leading journal on Creativity and Innovation Management, publishing novel and important research at the intersection of creativity and innovation that academics and practitioners like to read and researchers from all over the world want to publish in; the journal that researchers and practitioners look into when they want to learn something new. It is here that our reviewers play their most important role—they are the sailors enabling our journey to the stars.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A service provided by Crossref and powered by iThenticate.
- <sup>2</sup> As this paper takes its starting point in first submissions, triage is the first step. Revisions or resubmissions go to a similar step 1b—Managing editor decision; see below.
- <sup>3</sup> A functionality built into Manuscript Central.
- <sup>4</sup> This categorization is from Dr. Roel Schuring, formerly from the University of Twente, The Netherlands (unpublished).

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