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Editorial

Revise and Resubmit? Peer Reviewing Business Historical Research

Christina Lubinski
Dept. of Business Humanities and Law
Copenhagen Business School
Email: cl.bhl@cbs.dk

Stephanie Decker
Dept. of Strategy and International Business
University of Birmingham
Email: s.decker@bham.ac.uk

Niall MacKenzie
Adam Smith Business School
University of Glasgow
Email: Niall.Mackenzie@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract:

Peer review in *Business History* has benefited from the insights of over 550 expert reviewers over the past three years. In this editorial, we contextualize the journal's peer review process historically and in the available literature. We discuss some of the challenges of the double-blind review system, including securing reviewer engagement amidst time constraints and publication pressure, the dark sides of anonymization, and the role of bias, values, and interdisciplinarity in research evaluations. Based on these reflections, we furnish some concrete guidance for reviewers on how to approach business historical research. We end by contemplating the future landscape of peer review and opening a conversation about review standards and reviewer education in the field of business history. Is peer review ripe for a revise and resubmit?

Revise and Resubmit? Peer Reviewing Business Historical Research

Quality reviewing is essential for *Business History*. For many of us, becoming well-rounded scholars and advancing our careers was made possible through publications. That also meant that our work underwent thorough evaluation by colleagues who helped us develop our manuscripts and validated the significance of our work within the community.

Personally, every review I have ever received was constructive and thoughtful, developmental and a pleasure to read. No, that's a lie! That was certainly not the case. Many of us have experienced disappointment and even hurt when the dreaded reviews first arrive in our mailbox. I certainly have. More than once. And at times, I have indulged in epic self-pity sessions, or devoured jumbo-sized chocolate bars, or drowned my sorrows in enough of a certain red beverage to make a sommelier blush. Sometimes I wanted to react like Albert Einstein who replied to his editor John Tate at *Physical Review* that he and his co-author "had sent you our manuscript for *publication* … I see no reason to address the – in any case erroneous – comments of your anonymous expert. On the basis of this incident I prefer to publish the paper elsewhere." (Einstein, 1936, quoted in: Kennefick, 1999, pp. 208, emphasis in the original). Albert, I understand. We have all been there.

Upon reflection, however, I have often managed to decipher some hidden wisdom buried beneath the snarky remarks and blasé attitudes. It may feel like interpreting a secret code but the reviewers helped me develop my thinking and protected me from public accusations of ignorance. That didn't make me like them any better, but it had consequences. Constructive reviews had an immediate effect on my papers and the depths and clarity of the argument. Cumulatively, over time, the review process also had a long-term effect on my overall approach to research, knowledge of the field, and communication skills. While I may not be inviting my reviewers over for a friendly barbecue, I also can't deny their crucial role in the process.

Einstein's reaction is not just understandable on a human level; it also makes sense in historical perspective. In 1936, receiving reviewer reports was a very rare occurrence. The practice of journal peer review is a comparatively recent phenomenon. While its roots can arguably be traced back to antiquity (Farrell, Magida Farrell, & Farrell, 2017), historical research has shown that an institutionalization of this process only occurred in the second half of the twentieth century and took off sometime in the 1970s (Baldwin, 2018; Burnham,

1990, 2015; Csiszar, 2018). However, the origin story of peer review, allegedly stretching back centuries, may have played an important role in legitimizing and preserving our current system. By suggesting uninterrupted continuity, the myth created an unnecessary obstacle to critical revisions of the system. Is peer review ripe for a revise and resubmit?

Notably, for as long as the peer review process has existed, it has also sparked controversial debates (Csiszar, 2016). The list of complaints is long. Reviewing takes researchers' time away from other tasks and creates barriers to publication and delays. The peer review system tends to prioritize incremental over radical innovation, and regularly dismisses the most novel research results. Peer review reinforces the "closed club" feel of academia, drawing a line between insiders and outsiders that is likely supported just as much by homophily and social networks as by research quality. Reviewers and editors also have preferences and biases, and not all of them consciously reflect on their positionality or act ethically by the standards articulated, for example, by the Council of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE Council, 2017). Peer review gives our understanding of justice a good old shake.

While critics of peer review are thus not new, today the system arguably stands at a particularly intricate crossroads. Regular reports of biased reviews (Teplitskiy et al., 2018) and a surge in retracted papers in reputable journals stress the weaknesses of the system for quality control (Atwater et al., 2014; Spoelstra, Butler, & Delaney, 2016; Van Noorden, 2011). New forms of publishing, most notably open access and crowdsourcing, compete increasingly more effectively with the traditional publishing model of journals. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the (perceived) quality and speed of peer review, creating severe challenges especially for early career researchers (Jamali et al., 2023). Many of these pressures on academics have long existed but were compounded by the pandemic, resulting in scholars more regularly declining invitations to review. As a result, it has become more difficult to find qualified reviewers, and editors must choose from a smaller and less diverse pool (Driggers, 2015), even if commentators regularly highlight that peer reviewing is a professional responsibility (Treviño, 2008) and an ethical imperative (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2023).

At *Business History*, we count ourselves lucky to be able to draw on an engaged and generous community. You! However, even for us, it is at times hard to find helpful and qualified reviewers who are willing to perform this service to our community. Moreover,

Business History celebrates historical research that is deeply integrated with other disciplines. The journal is programmatically interdisciplinary. For the peer-review system, that is an additional headache because it requires us to evaluate many if not most papers for "dual integrity" (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016). Working with reviewers from different epistemic communities – historians, organization and management scholars, anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and more – puts an additional burden on the peer review system.

For these reasons, we consider it important to start demystifying peer review and promoting an exchange of ideas about the process. Undoubtedly, as the pace and complexity of journal publishing increases, peer review also needs to evolve. But peer review is a community practice and can only survive if the community buys into it. As editors, we strongly believe that for peer review to be meaningful, we are accountable to our authors and readers and must create a transparent and adaptable review process.

In this editorial, we focus our attention on the process of soliciting reviews from academic peers to evaluate and improve journal submissions and make publication decisions. The discussion does not extend to peer review in other settings (grant applications, research evaluations, promotions), although certain insights might be relevant in these contexts, too. We first contextualize peer review historically and in the literature and discuss how the process matters for *Business History*. Then we put some best practices for reviewing for *Business History* up for debate, specifically to initiate a conversation about standards and to make it easier for new reviewers to join our community. We end with a discussion of future challenges for peer review and how we are planning to address them.

To initiate more debate around these crucial issues, we have solicited "reviews" – the kind that are developmental and thoughtful – from other journal editors and have printed them as commentaries in full alongside this piece. This review process is not "blind" like our regular procedure. Rather, it names the reviewers, prints their critique, and credits them with having contributed to the development of this article and having shared their comments and alternative views. Taken together these opinion pieces are an invitation to discuss how, if at all, we want to nurture peer review in our community. In our social media activities, you find these discussions marked with #peerreview, #academicpublishing and #bizhis. We will compile all of your ideas and debates in our #peerreeviewweek on social media in February 2024.

The Peer Review Process

In an era of fake news and misinformation (Huber, 1991; Swire-Thompson & Lazer, 2022) it is paramount to discern credible research and evaluate how it was conducted. The peer review process intends to serve this important goal. One of its main objectives is to ensure the quality of research and help authors develop their work to reach its full potential.

Peer Review at Business History

At *Business History*, the review process starts with the editors-in-chief assessing all incoming papers to decide if they should be desk rejected for fit with the journal's objectives or formal shortcomings. If papers pass this initial hurdle, an associate editor is assigned and then asks at least two expert reviewers for their comments on the paper. Our process is double-blind, meaning authors and reviewers are unknown to each other. In the past three years (Jan. 1, 2020 to present), we have invited a total of 913 experts to conduct reviews. 551, or 60%, of them have also accepted our invitation and completed their reviews. We count ourselves very lucky to be able to draw on such an engaged and generous group of scholars. Among those supporters of our community, 147, or 27%, were also authors in *Business History* during the same time period.

The reviewers evaluate the manuscript for its contribution, the strength of the argument, and to identify any flaws or inaccuracies. An important part of this process is detecting potential bias, ethical issues, or conflicts of interest. The reviewers report back to the editors in their written comments and, if applicable, make suggestions for revising the paper. Based on the reviews and their own reading, the editors then arrive at a decision about the manuscript (see, ***Table 1*** for possible outcomes.) In the decision letter, the editors summarize the main concerns, weigh them in importance, and if applicable identify a way forward for the paper. Importantly, the decision letter not just communicates the editor's decision, which may vary from the reviewers' recommendations, but also deals with contradicting advice and provides guidance to the authors for the next steps in the review process. A second and third round of reviews, usually with the same set of reviewers, is common. However, we tend to draw the line at four rounds. If a clear and time-efficient path to publication is not visible at this stage, the editors will share the feedback but reject the paper for publication.

Table 1: Peer Review Decisions at Business History

Decision	Explanation	Typical timeline
Reject	The manuscript is unsound or unsuitable for publication at *Business History*.	N/A
Reject & resubmit	The manuscript is unsuitable in its current form, but the editors would consider a significantly revised version of it for peer review and publication.	1 year
Major revision	Editors and reviewers make suggestions for major revisions of the manuscript. Typically these include: restructuring of the paper, engaging new literature, clarifying concepts and arguments, further developing contributions, correcting inaccuracies. Revisions along these lines may lead to publication.	3 months
Minor revision	Editor and reviewers make suggestions for minor revisions of the manuscript. Typically these include: correcting inaccuracies, engaging specific publications, presenting research results in a different form. Revision along these lines will likely lead to publication.	1 months
Conditionally accept	The manuscript will be accepted for publication under certain conditions. Typically such conditions can include: correcting inaccuracies, submitting (parts of) the manuscript in a different format, adjusting the manuscript to the journal style sheet.	3 weeks
Accept	The manuscript has been accepted for publication and goes into production.	Immediate

To support the editorial decision-making process, reviewers at every stage also have the option of sending confidential comments to the editor, which are not shared with the authors. Of course, it is important not to send a different message in the comments to the author than in the confidential note to the editor. Yet, some reviewers appreciate the opportunity to share reflections or concerns confidentially with the editors, so that they can follow them up before communicating with the authors. Independent of the outcome of the process, reviewers and editors work to improve the paper. In addition, their efforts validate the research, and the readers of *Business History* know that all articles underwent this review process.

Peer review is undoubtedly costly. It requires time and attention that could be allocated to other tasks. However, it also has benefits for the authors, the reviewers, and the field of business history. For the authors, a well-executed review can be a game-changer, influencing their lives and careers in a profound way. Especially for early-career scholars and

for anyone engaging in interdisciplinary work, qualified reviewers can help guide them towards more impactful publications.

For the reviewers, the process exposes them to new ideas, methods, and literature. Reviewing is an opportunity to learn and develop the field. At *Business History*, we share all of the reviews and the editorial decision letter not just with the authors but also with the reviewers. As a consequence, each reviewer can compare their own assessment with the comments by their colleagues, which is educational for all participants. Peer reviewing also has a reputational effect, and constructive peer reviewers become known to journal editors, conference chairs and the community more broadly, triggering further opportunities. Finally, reviewing also gives people an overview and some influence over what kind of research the community values. For that reason, it is important to not draw from too small a pool of reviewers, which would result in limited perspectives being represented.

For the field of business history, peer review provides an opportunity to engage the community and is instrumental for the collective development of knowledge. Reviewers provide an enormous service by elevating the work they review and drawing connections to the historiography. For many reviewers, a strong intrinsic motivation relates to contributing to their community and giving back for service they themselves have received (Campbell & Conlon, 2021). But reviewers are also stewards of a larger academic endeavor (Suddaby, 2014; Tsui, 2016), with a responsibility towards advancing knowledge that is relevant to society. Oftentimes, we look to historical research to gain new insights into our own moment in time. Such an historical approach yields valuable results, for example when it comes to understanding the evolution of the peer review process itself.

Historical Evolution of Peer Review

Conventional historical accounts of peer review often convey the notion that referee systems have an ancient lineage. “[P]eer review”, argued Kronick (1990, p. 1321), “can be said to have existed ever since people began to identify and communicate what they thought was new knowledge”. It is easy to be misled into thinking that the role and mechanics of the peer review system have endured with relatively little change throughout time.

Yet, the formal system of peer review as a required part of the publishing process in scholarly journals is a relatively recent phenomenon. It became institutionalized only in the

last third of the twentieth century (Baldwin, 2018). Optional expert reports and ad-hoc requests for comments have a much longer history. In fact, scholars have at times credited Henry Oldenburg with inventing modern peer review for the seventeenth century *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (Zuckerman & Merton, 1971). Farrell et al. (2017) even find review-like commentaries in the ancient medical profession, which they argue resemble forms of modern peer review. Yet, the work of Melinda Baldwin (2015a, 2018) and Alex Csiszar (2018) shows that the occasional consulting with colleagues about the merits of submissions or post-publication reviews did not progress or naturally lead into the formal system of peer review as we know it today.

The basic building blocks of academics evaluating each other's work, providing developmental feedback, and in some cases remaining anonymous to facilitate candid advice was certainly in place in these precursors of peer review. Yet, the formalized peer review system followed a non-linear trajectory, with great variation in the practices of editors, journals, and grant giving institutions (Burnham, 1990). Renowned outlets, like *Science* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA)* did not systematically use reviewers until the 1940s; *The Lancet* and *Nature* not until the 1970s (Baldwin, 2015b, 2018; Burnham, 1990; Farrell, Magida Farrell, & Farrell, 2017). Refereeing was also uncommon in non-English speaking countries, such as France and Germany (Csiszar, 2018; Pyenson, 1985, pp. 194-214). The need to fill pages as well as the time and costs of peer review discouraged editors from systematically adopting such processes. Well into the mid-twentieth century, peer review was either absent from journals or done in a haphazard way.

As new technologies facilitated a wider distribution of texts and the number of scholarly articles expanded, it became harder for individual editors and editorial boards to make decisions on all the submissions they received. Thus, they increasingly turned to experts to lighten their workload and benefit from their knowledge. There is some debate among historians about the question if journal and grant peer review evolved independently of each other (Burnham, 1990) or if the two systems mutually inspired and reinforced each other (Baldwin, 2018). Certainly, the growing demands for expert authority and perceived objectivity in an increasingly specialized academic world, created the environment in which peer review procedures became more established and standardized in the 1960s and 1970s.

It was during this time that expanding government funding for scientific research met new public scrutiny, especially in the United States, where the term "peer review" was

coined. Originally, peer review denoted the assessments of medical practices to ensure adherence to Medicare and Medicaid regulations, thus foregrounding compliance rather than research excellence. In political debates about US funding bodies and their review and decision-making processes, the concept of anonymous peer review in its current form emerged most clearly. In the context of Cold War tensions, being ahead of the other bloc in science and technology was a major driving force, but it also raised the question if funding bodies were spending public money appropriately. In response, science organizations pointed to peer review as a rigorous screening procedure to justify their choices (Baldwin, 2018). Peer review was a way to increase the public and political legitimacy of research while simultaneously avoiding the interference of non-academics in the evaluation of academic research.

As the 1970s drew to a close, the practice of peer review had solidified its position as core to the process of evaluating the quality and credibility of research. In 1985, Stephen Lock (1985) published a book on peer review titled *A Difficult Balance,* emphasizing the importance of weighing authors' free expression with expert advice without tilting the scale too far in either direction. Shortly thereafter, in 1989, *JAMA* organized the first world congress on peer review in Chicago (American Medical Association, 1989; Rennie, 1999). The latest, ninth congress on peer review took place in 2022 and included, among other themes, discussions of the use of artificial intelligence and open science (Ioannidis et al., 2021). These get-togethers created room for debate about peer reviewing and stressed challenges that the system struggles with to this day.

Debating Peer Review

Since its widespread adoption roughly five decades ago, many observers have commented on the formalized peer review process. It is beyond the scope of this article to review all of these contributions in depth. A broad overview shows that the earliest debates occurred in medicine and natural sciences, where the peer review system originated. Yet, social sciences have also actively participated in reflections on peer review, usually in the form of journal editorials. Broadly speaking, contributions to the peer review debate engage three themes: (1) technical how-to guides and principles of reviewer education, (2) reflections on the role of peer review in a changing academic system, and (3) failures of the peer review system.

Technical how-to guides and principles of reviewer education: There is no scarcity of editorials clarifying how to review for specific journals or which review style to choose for which type of submission. Typically, these instructions appear as course material in higher education (Yates, 2002) or editorials in management studies (DeSimone et al., 2021; Griffin & Barczak, 2020; Ragins, 2017), ethics (Borkowski & Welsh, 1998), and other disciplines adjacent to business history. Book-length instructions are less frequent and tend to follow the structure of editorials but expand on them with detailed examples (Barczak & Griffin, 2021; Paltridge, 2017; Weller, 2001). So far, discussions of the characteristics of reviewing historical contributions, specifically, are largely absent (for an exemption, see Seifried, 2017).

Frequently written by editors or long-standing members of the community, how-to guides tend to advocate for a developmental review style (Ragins, 2017) and frame the process of peer review as a conversation (Bettis et al., 2016). By and large, there is a consensus on the principles that should guide peer review, even if they have been expressed in different ways, including as the "Bill of Rights for Manuscript Authors" (Harrison, 2002) and as "Five Principles for Better Peer Review" (Allen et al., 2019). Good peer review, they argue, should have content integrity, be ethical, fair, useful, and delivered on time. To arrive at such standards, it is important to invest in reviewer education, for example in the form of reviewing workshops at conferences, informal mentoring relationships, and formalized reviewing competencies (Carpenter, 2009; Köhler et al., 2020; Tsui, 2016, p. 21).

Reflections on the role of peer review in a changing academic system: Especially in management publications, authors have also debated the role of peer review in a changing academic system. There is a consensus that academia has adopted principles of managerialism, which reflect in a widespread and intrusive audit culture (Argento, Dobija, & Grossi, 2020; Parker, 2011), fueled by an industry of rankings (Walsh 2011). Tsui (2016, p. 17) describes science in many business schools as turning into an "annual pageant show … using criteria that are observable and countable to achieve some degree (or semblance) of objectivity." Hiring and promotion decisions therefore become closely intertwined with the peer review system that serves as a gatekeeper for "valuable" (by these standards) publications.

Critics lament that such audit culture relies less on close readings and qualitative reviews of research content and instead measures performance by easily countable proxies, such as the "A-journal" (Aguinis et al., 2020), creating a hyper-competitive environment for

researchers that has been suspected of limiting progress and triggering unethical behavior (Edwards & Roy, 2017). This setting has a direct effect on the peer review process. It incentivizes researchers to decline requests for review because they take time and do not "count" as research (Dean & Forray, 2018, p. 165) or limit the time they invest into reviewing, possibly at the expense of quality. Even more disturbingly, some scholars misuse the peer review process to request citations of their own work to improve their citation score or exclude critics or outsiders (Ridley, 2023). Ironically, these challenges to the peer review system also call into question the "governing by numbers" that universities engage in. If the peer review system is rigged, auditing employees based on it may soon fail to deliver desirable results (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2023).

Failures of the peer review system: In the context of this audit culture, failures of the peer review system have an impact on individual academics as well as the community. Multiple commentators have decried the systemic failures of peer review, pointing towards the flaws of human judgment, tendencies of homophily (Lamont, 2009; Ridley, 2023), deliberate manipulations of the peer review process (Edwards & Roy, 2017, pp. 52-53), retractions of papers in reputable peer-reviewed journals (Atwater et al., 2014; Spoelstra, Butler, & Delaney, 2016; Van Noorden, 2011), and a host of unethical or fraudulent behaviors that reviewers and authors can engage in (Tsui & Galaskiewicz, 2011).

Scholars have also expressed concern with the deteriorating commitment to the review process. Frequently, it seems, scholars decline invitations to review while still expecting reviews of their own submitted manuscripts, putting the *quid pro quo* system to the test. Recently, Lindebaum & Jordan (2023, p. 397) have called for a necessary "politicization of the review process" to address this free-rider problem.

Finally, it is not surprising for a community practice such as peer review that conventions and professional networks shape the judgement of reviewers (Teplitskiy et al., 2018). Research paradigms and scholarly networks clearly signal to (even anonymous) reviewers some familiarity with the manuscript. While academic conventions influence the peer review process, they often remain unaddressed in debates about peer review (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2023, p. 400). For a multi-disciplinary journal like *Business History*, however, the positionality of the reviewer matters greatly for the advice reviewers provide and the outcomes of the review process.

The Challenge of Interdisciplinarity

Navigating interdisciplinarity involves difficult translation and integration work (Bedeian, 2004; Seifried, 2017; Zald, 1993). Editors have to reflect the different backgrounds, frames of references, and leading concepts in their choice of reviewers, their reading of reviews, and editorial decision-making. Authors must work with reviewer comments rooted in different epistemic communities. And even reviewers often struggle with seeing their own interpretation next to the critique of others, asking themselves: did I misjudge this? Or, are these not "my people"?

In her ethnographical work on interdisciplinary panels judging grant applications, Lamont (2009, p. 4) finds that different disciplines define research excellence in different ways. She argues that we have not fully appreciated the diverse meanings assigned to the criteria of evaluation. Her research shows that historians come to a disciplinary consensus based on a "shared sense of craftsmanship", whereas other communities, broadly speaking, prioritize setting boundaries for the discipline (anthropology), arguing for its legitimacy (English literature), or finding agreements based on mathematical formalism (economics). Historical craftsmanship usually refers to careful archival work that is thoroughly contextualized (Bloch, 1954) as well as a focus on understanding the idiosyncrasies of the past (Lowenthal, 2015).

Some judgment criteria often debated in peer review include originality, methodological rigor, and theoretical approach. Academic communities differ in their evaluation of originality, which refers variously to novel approaches, new data, the application of less frequently used methods, or even novel forms of presenting research results. In business historical work, we often look towards the originality of the historiographical contribution, which could mean new evidence or new interpretation of evidence. However, *Business History* also regularly publishes manuscripts that yield original theoretical or methodological insights (For the most recent examples, see Iordanou, Forthcoming; Lubinski et al., Forthcoming; Nix & Decker, 2023; Ram, Giacomin, & Wakslak, Forthcoming). The place of theory and the range of its applicability is a related point of distinction, with historians often focusing on mid-range theories or challenges to existing theoretical approaches. While some disciplines favor hypothesis testing, others reject such approaches in favor of contextual and narrative methods (For a discussion of the role of

these approaches in business history, see De Jong, Higgins, & van Driel, 2015; and the reply by Decker, Kipping, & Wadhwani, 2015). Typically, historians engage in "how" questions, explore the world from the perspective of historical actors, and examine processes over time. Much work in recent years has been devoted to explicating historical methods for other disciplines (for a recently published handbook see Decker, Foster, & Giovannoni, 2023), creating a body of knowledge that facilitates interdisciplinary authoring and reviewing. Last but not least, historians also often discuss narrative styles and the aesthetics of storytelling (Kibler & Laine, Forthcoming; Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017), which is a criterion less explicitly valued in other disciplines. In sum, we tend to overlook the importance of judgment criteria and rarely ask how they are shaped by the social identity of the reviewer and vary greatly between disciplines. Whose standards are we applying in peer review?

History journals may be particularly challenged by these differences because history is often seen as holding a hybrid status between the social sciences and the humanities (Bourke & Skinner, 2022; Lamont, 2009, p. 57; Zald, 1993), a fact that also reflects in institutional arrangements. In the UK, for example, historians can apply to both the Arts & Humanities and the Economic & Social Science research council. One could argue that the notion of "peer" review cannot fully apply to such interdisciplinary work. Standards used to evaluate interdisciplinary research are not simply a combination of standards of single disciplines but rather emerge as a hybrid. It is thus paramount that our reviewers engage manuscripts with some openness for other disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives, rather than imposing their own preferences or standards of their field on authors.

A large and interdisciplinary reviewer pool can certainly help address this challenge. However, we find that it needs to be combined with reviewers being aware and clearly articulating their perspective, and with editorial decision-letters actively raising the issue of interdisciplinarity as a topic—both practices we encourage and support at *Business History*. Some commentators have pled for objective and unbiased assessments of scholarly work. However, we think that this ambition is ill-conceived. Rather than pretending that peer review can be completely detached from the reviewer's identity and values, we suggest clarity around the social and ethical beliefs that have influenced the assessment, which then also allows reviewers to "read with" the authors and take their ideas seriously. We encourage our reviewers to explicitly disclose their beliefs, rather than to strive for the

elusive ideal of value-free science (Tsui, 2016). Values, we posit, are necessary and important in the pursuit of *responsible* business historical research.

Reviewing in Business History: How-To Recommendations

When asking people to review, *Business History*, like most academic journals, shares some guidelines for reviewers. Yet, for less experienced reviewers these short instructions leave much to be desired. More information is available on the website of Taylor & Francis, where the publisher provides guides for peer review (see, ***Table 2***). While these instructions are very useful, especially for newbies to the peer review system, they are not meant to be specific to the needs of authors or reviewers of *Business History*.

Table 2: Taylor & Francis' Online Resources for Peer Review

Title	Content	Link
What is Peer Review? A Guide For Authors	An overview of principles and practices of peer review, with concrete guidance.	Link
Peer Review: The Nuts and Bolts	A guide to peer review written for early career researchers, published by Sense about Science.	Link
A Guide to Becoming a Peer Reviewer	An overview of what's involved in becoming a reviewer for a Taylor & Francis journal.	Link
Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers	Standards for peer reviewing produced by COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics.	Link

Author Services Taylor & Francis, https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/publishing-your-research/peer-review/, all last accessed Aug. 19, 2023.

We intend this editorial to provide some guidance for reviewing business historical work. However, it is important to state upfront that we outline one approach among many, captured in condensed form in ***Figure 1*** and ***Appendix 1***. Academics will naturally cultivate their own unique style and preferences when engaging in peer review, and we do not want to change that. The richness of various review methods greatly benefits editors in their decision-making process and supports authors in their pursuit of enhancing their papers. Thus, we understand our approach not as a rigid mandate, but rather as an open invitation for a constructive dialogue about current and future forms of peer review. We suggest that reviewers think about the task in two steps: (1) conducting the review and (2) writing up their comments for authors and editors.

Conducting the Review

Figure 1

In the first step, reviewers may start by getting an overview and familiarizing themselves with the main argument and the structure of the paper. Having carefully read the manuscript, it will likely be beneficial to consider the reviewer's unique perspective on it. We value reviewers reflecting on their own positionality and frame of reference. By placing oneself in a particular tradition or school, reviewers help the editors and authors to frame their comments appropriately and thus understand them better. While acknowledging their point of departure, we also expect our reviewers to take the authors' perspective seriously and not impose their own voice onto the authors. Good reviews should provide guidance to the authors for developing their manuscript, and sometimes may even encourage creativity and play (Wadhwani & Sørensen, 2023). They should not alienate the authors from their work. For that reason, we appreciate reviewers who also acknowledge the strengths of a manuscript. Peer review by design focuses the attention on a manuscript's weaknesses. However, we find that explicitly engaging with merits of the work sets the tone for a constructive dialogue between authors and reviewers.

The next step is identifying needs for development. While some reviewers create a list of critical remarks, we agree with Harrison (2002) and Yates (2002) that it is useful to

broadly structure the notes in “major” and “minor” issues to channel the attention of authors and editors to what matters. This is also helpful to the editor for the purpose of estimating how much time authors will likely require to address these comments. In ***Appendix 1*** we offer reviewers a set of guiding questions for the respective sections of a manuscript: title/abstract, introduction, literature review, sources and methods, empirical analysis/historical narrative, discussion/contributions, and conclusion. While these questions will not all be applicable to a specific manuscript, they may give reviewers a starting point for thinking about the manuscript.

At the end of the review process, reviewers will ask themselves how original and significant the work is, whether its findings are incremental or radical, and if the manuscript has the potential to be published in *Business History*, or not.

Writing the Review

Once the reviewer has conducted the review, the second step in the process is to write the open-ended comments to authors and editors. Some reviewers prefer this write up to be a narrative, others elect to convey their thoughts by section of the manuscript. In both cases it is valuable to broadly structure the review in an introductory paragraph with the overall judgment, a brief highlight of the paper’s strengths, a main review discussing major and minor issues of the paper and recommendations for the revision, and a brief conclusion.

While many different forms of assessment can be developmental, reviewers should restrain from forcing their personal preferences on authors or peddling their own work (Bedeian, 2003). The peer review process is supposed to be critical. However, its goal is not to show how the reviewer(s) would have written the paper, but rather take the authors’ argument seriously. It is also worthwhile highlighting that reviews should always be respectful in tone and content. Sometimes reviewers may be asked to comment on manuscripts by non-native English speakers. In those cases, we encourage reviewers to be honest, for example about the need for additional copy-editing, but also distinguish as best as possible between language inadequacies and the quality of the research and argument.

Once a set of reviews and an editorial decision letter have been shared with the authors of the manuscript, the ball is back in the authors’ court. It is important for the development of the paper and the transparency of the process that the authors actively respond to the comments by editors and reviewers, and not rely on their revised manuscript

alone. The response letter is an opportunity to showcase the work that the authors have done, raise topics of disagreement, engage in a conversation but also demonstrate respect for the time and effort that the reviewers have voluntarily invested into the development of the manuscript.

Importantly, it is worth restating that the suggestions in this section are meant as guidelines, especially for less experienced reviewers, and not as prescriptions. There are numerous excellent approaches to reviewing, and we strongly encourage readers of *Business History* to engage as reviewers so that they can get exposed to the varieties of developmental reviews represented in our community – and find their own style.

Evolution or Revolution? The Future of Peer Reviewing

Innovations in peer review are plentiful (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2022), and we are open to a constructive dialogue about the purpose and efficiency of *Business History's* peer review process. In the literature, some ideas take a pragmatic approach, aiming at reducing the transaction costs of peer review, for example by detecting forms of plagiarism with AI. Others make suggestion for enhanced rigor, be that targeted at analytical or ethical standards. For our community, discussions of pluralistic understandings of quality may also be of interest given the interdisciplinary nature of many submissions to our journal. So far, existing debates have focused primarily on different forms of anonymity in peer review as well as on novel approaches to reviewer recruitment. We'll discuss both here in turn.

Debates about the pros and cons of different forms of transparency in peer review are common. *Business History* adheres to a double-blind process, with both authors and reviewers unknown to each other. This is the norm in humanities and social sciences but comes with its own set of challenges. Alternatively, some fields work with single-blind reviews, where the authors are known to the reviewers but the reviewers remain anonymous (a common practice in many science journals), or the reviewers are named but the authors remains anonymous, at least until publication. Few communities have adopted a fully open review process with both sides known to each other (Nature Neuroscience, 1999). Radical is also the proposal of some open peer review platforms, like Qeios, which allow manuscripts to be uploaded prior to undergoing peer-review and publish all reviews alongside the article.

The concern with double-blind review is that it facilitates unethical behavior by reviewers and creates room for unnecessarily negative or hurtful remarks. Yet, most commentators also agree that candid advice depends on blind review, that revealing the authors may lead to conscious or unconscious discrimination, and that early-career academics should have at least the option of remaining anonymous to balance out power differentials. With working papers often available online in non-commercial repositories before or during the review process, blind review is de facto not always guaranteed. In smaller disciplines, reviewers and authors can often guess each other's identity, or at least think they can. But should business historians be encouraged to disclose their identities in the review process? Should it be their choice? Would *Business History's* peer review work more effectively if we revised our rules of anonymity? Our position is that the potential power differentials between reviewers and authors mean that one size is not going to fit all. On balance, anonymity provides important benefits and should be an option. However, we are keen to hear our readers' opinions whether self-disclosure of reviewers should be possible and which benefits they see it yield.

A second important area of innovation is reviewer recruitment. Some journals have experimented with crowd-sourced peer review (where manuscripts are posted online and can be commented on by anyone) or intelligent crowd reviewing (with selected but interacting expert reviewers). In both cases, editors rely on multiple interacting reviewers to make publication decisions (List, 2017). Qeios and similar platforms place their emphasis on post-publication reviews, fostering open communication between reviewers and authors. These reviews are posted alongside the respective articles, each receiving citable DOI numbers. While it may seem radical, there could be good reasons to consider interactive reviewers rather than keeping them separate, and the fact that we are sharing all reviewer reports with all reviewers indicates that there are many workable models that require only minor modifications to the status quo. The circulation of ideas may at times lead to important debates that can increase the quality of the final publication and reduce homophilous tendencies in the review process (Ridley, 2023).

Decisions about reviewer recruitment are intricately intertwined with reviewer education, which, if done effectively, could expand the pool of potential reviewers and guarantee that more and more diverse voices are being represented. Harley (2019) reminds us that a big part of reviewer education is senior scholars setting an example. It is important

to encourage scholars to review and to show some pride in developmental review work. This process may be supported by conversations about the opportunities associated with reviewing, such as acquainting oneself with future research, learning about the publishing process, and influencing the spectrum of what is to be considered relevant research.

In an ideal world, universities would value reviewing as an important contribution to academic citizenship, which is often not or only tangentially done. In the absence of such recognition, we plan to start acknowledging our *Business History* reviewers more directly. We already regularly use our web-based tracking system to look at reviewers' activities over the past few years and determine new editorial board members among the reviewers that show outstanding engagement. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our editorial board members for their reliable and continuous work in reviewing for the journal and for the many other contributions they make!

In addition, we are planning to introduce a reviewer recognition award, which will serve as an acknowledgement of our most constructive and high-quality reviewers. These best reviewers will be named by the associate editors based on a set of criteria: quality of the feedback, constructiveness and willingness to "read with" the author, and timely delivery. We plan to include their names in one *Business History* issue annually and thank them on our website and on social media.

Finally, we have noticed some journals establishing a formalized reviewer progression path (for an example, see *The Academy of Management Review's* Bridge Reviewer program.) At *Business History*, we have not done this so far. However, we are open to scholars approaching us and asking for different kinds of support in the review process. Among these are review "trials," in which we adopt an extra reviewer for a manuscript who becomes a full member of the review process, reads and reviews the submission alongside the formal reviewers, and sees all reviews and decision letters associated with this manuscript. The submitted comments of this reviewer are treated as suggestions and can be discussed with the editor before submission. If potential reviewers would like to explore this option, please reach out to one of the authors of this editorial. Online or by email, your comments on the peer review system in our community are important and welcome!

Appendix 1: Conducting a Review

1. Get an overview of the manuscript

Goal: Familiarizing oneself with the argument under review and the structure of the paper; considering the reviewer's unique perspective on the manuscript.

Guiding questions:

What is the main argument of the manuscript? What are the authors trying to accomplish? What impact would this have on the field of business history? Is the purpose of the paper clearly articulated?

How do I as a reviewer relate to this work? Why did the editors want my expertise for this paper? How does my position, values, and background affect my evaluation? Am I open to the authors' argument and take it seriously on its own terms?

Example:

The manuscript provides a discussion of the review process in peer reviewed journals, and contextualizes the double-blind review process historically and in the available literature. As an editor of a historical journal, I have been exposed to many of these discussions before and I appreciate the authors' attempt to introduce a unique humanistic perspective.

2. Acknowledge strengths of the manuscript

Goal: Note the strengths and potential of the work, setting the tone for a conversation between reviewers and authors.

Guiding questions:

What do I like about this paper? Which are its strengths? Which parts of the manuscript have revealed novel and intriguing insights to me? What is the potential of this manuscript after successful revision?

Example:

The authors have rigorously reviewed the available social science and history literature, challenging themselves to advance an interdisciplinary perspective. The manuscript has the potential to trigger a long overdue discussion about peer review.

3. Identify need for development

Goal: Critical and developmental review of the manuscript, structured by major and minor issues to signal relevance.

Within this broad division, the review may follow the structure put forward by the authors or address (some of) the typical sections of a manuscript:

(1) Title and abstract
(2) Introduction
(3) Literature review/historiography
(4) Sources and methods
(5) Empirical analysis/historical narrative
(6) Discussion/contributions
(7) Conclusion, limitations and future research

Only address the sections for which you make suggestions for revision. Note concrete evidence for any critique, e.g. by using page and line numbers.

Guiding questions:

Is the purpose of the paper clear? How can I support the authors in developing the manuscript further? Which steps could enhance the paper's development and help it realize its potential? Is the paper interesting to read?

Which critical points have to be addressed to make the paper publishable? What is needed to reinforce the claims made by the authors? Which concerns do I have about this paper's execution and impact?

(1) Title and abstract: Does the title indicate the main argument of the paper? Does the abstract accurately reflect the paper? Will it attract readers? Does the abstract include key findings?

(2) Introduction: Does the introduction have an exciting "hook" or compelling statement, and give an appropriate reason for why this research is important? Does it articulate a clear research question? Does it effectively position the research in the relevant field? Does it signal a contribution?

(3) Literature review/historiography: Which theoretical conversation do the authors enter and have they shown the current state of this conversation? Is the literature review a useful synthesis of the available research on this topic? Are important concepts clearly defined? Is the section structured in a way that makes it easy for the reader to understand links between individual contributions? Is the section missing any significant parts of the literature? Does the literature review presents gaps that the paper plans to address?

(4) Sources and methods: Have the authors clearly stated which sources/data they are using and how they have gained access to them? Why did they choose this research context and what are its limitations? Have they reflected on how these sources survived and which others may not have? Is the method applied reasonable and well justified? Have they provided me with enough information to judge their approach?

Are the authors *showing* the empirical material rather than giving only their interpretation of it?

(5) Empirical analysis: Is the paper telling a coherent story? Is the historical narrative appropriately structured? Have the authors articulated why it is structured this way? Is the empirical material presented well? If applicable, do the authors make good use of tables and figures?

(6) Discussion/contributions: Does the discussion successfully relate the empirical insights back to the historiography, theory, or research question? Are the insights revealed novel and rigorously presented?

(7) Conclusion, limitations and future research: Is the conclusion clear and well-articulated? Are there limitations that should be noted? Which future research directions does the study suggest? Why are the results meaningful and for whom?

4. Concluding remarks

Overall assessment, determining how original and significant the work is and if the paper has the potential to be published in *Business History*, or not.

Guiding questions:

How original is the work presented? How rigorously have the authors presented their work? Are the findings incremental or radical? Has the paper the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of business history?

Example:

I believe this work is significant and worthy of publication in *Business History* because …

5. If applicable, confidential remarks to the editors only

Guiding questions:

What is my unvarnished opinion about this paper? Is there any issue or concern with the paper that requires an informal conversation with the editor? Do I have reason to suspect a conflict of interest, plagiarism, or an ethical issue? Which are the reasons that led to my recommendation, which I didn't want to share directly with the authors?

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