



## Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society

Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era: A journal editor's response to the limited mind reading skills of academic authors

Edgar A. Whitley

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Edgar A. Whitley , (2016), "Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era", Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, Vol. 14 Iss 1 pp. 29 - 32

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JICES-11-2015-0041>

Downloaded on: 10 November 2016, At: 21:09 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 9 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 59 times since 2016\*

### Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2016), "Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era", Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, Vol. 14 Iss 1 pp. 4-15 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JICES-08-2015-0026>

(2016), "Publication ethics: stressing the positive", Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, Vol. 14 Iss 1 pp. 20-23 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JICES-10-2015-0037>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:563821 []

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era

Challenges to  
ethical  
publishing

## A journal editor's response to the limited mind reading skills of academic authors

29

Edgar A. Whitley

*Department of Management, The London School of Economics and  
Political Science, London, UK*

Received 27 November 2015  
Revised 4 January 2016  
Accepted 6 January 2016

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to respond to Curno's article from the perspective of a journal editor.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is analysed and a commentary formulated.

**Findings** – A tacit knowledge perspective is developed.

**Research limitations/implications** – The perspective is of one editor of a journal published by Emerald.

**Originality/value** – Given that the perspective is of a current editor, it provides a distinctive practical insight into some of the issues surrounding academic authorship.

**Keywords** Tacit knowledge, Plagiarism, Editor

**Paper type** Viewpoint

Curno's (2016) paper provides a provocative assessment of the various ethical challenges that we all, including journal editors, face in the digital era. In this response, I want to focus on what might be described as the "unintended" unethical behaviours that can arise and make some suggestions for how we might respond to them. In doing so, I leave aside the more intentional unethical behaviours that some have argued are a response to the increased pressure to publish (and publish as much as possible) ("counting"), instead of focussing on the contribution of the research ("reading") (cf Willcocks *et al.*, 2008; Worrell, 2009; Grey and Sinclair, 2006).

A key argument in Curno's (2016, p. yy) paper is the "confusion for authors of what are acceptable writing practices and what are not". To a large extent, this confusion arises because of the limited mind-reading skills of many academic authors. Here, I draw on Collins' (2010) differentiation between tacit and explicit knowledge. Collins notes that much of what is commonly called tacit knowledge is tacit not because it *cannot* be made explicit but rather remains "tacit" because historically, we have chosen not to make it explicit, often because we assume that our conversation partners understand what we are talking about and so do not need it to be made explicit. In an environment where there is shared socialisation or "cultural transmission of practices" (2016, p. yy), this assumption of mutual understanding may well hold. In other environments, however, including



Journal of Information,  
Communication and Ethics in  
Society

Vol. 14 No. 1, 2016

pp. 29-32

© Emerald Group Publishing Limited

1477-996X

DOI 10.1108/JICES-11-2015-0041

international scholarship, mind-reading skills may be the only way to access this “tacit” knowledge if it is not made explicit.

Therefore, in the absence of widespread mind-reading skills, there is a need to be explicit about expectations of academic writing, including appropriate citation of sources and self-plagiarism (Samuelson, 1994), and to convey this clearly to potential authors. For example, much of the current tension about whether authors should be listed in alphabetical order or in order of work contribution can be resolved by having institutions clearly state how they evaluate author lists (Krasnova *et al.*, 2014). For example, despite having a surname toward the end of the alphabet, I do not worry too much about alphabetical order being misconstrued as signalling limited contribution as my own institution uses a form of author contribution statement in its internal tenure and promotion processes.

Fortunately, journals and PhD programmes are increasingly describing what is considered ethical behaviour. Nevertheless, there are probably still areas where the knowledge remains unnecessarily “tacit”, so I will articulate some common examples that, as a journal editor, we have received. These have arisen because of the lack of clarity about expectations (or authors not reading the available guidance) rather than deliberate attempts to deceive and are often raised at “meet the editors” sessions at international conferences.

A common question is whether it is acceptable to submit a conference paper directly to the journal? Our answer: Time will have passed since the conference paper was submitted, since the paper was presented and since the feedback on the conference presentation was received; all these factors are likely to contribute new ideas that could make the underlying paper even better, and the journal would expect (hope) to receive (and publish) the resulting even better paper. Another question is whether it is acceptable to submit a paper that originally appeared in a different language but is otherwise unchanged apart from the translation? Again, we would hope that both the translation process and further reflection on the paper’s argument would lead to us receiving an enhanced version of the paper rather than a simple translation.

Another example of often unarticulated “tacit” knowledge is whether the authors should submit a covering note that explains the full history or provenance of the paper. To journal editors, “it is obvious” that providing this information is incredibly helpful. For example, if a reviewer reports that they have seen the paper presented at a conference, we do not need to launch an investigation into the possible academic misconduct, as we can simply reassure the reviewer that we know that the submission is an enhanced version of the conference paper.

Similarly, it is helpful if the authors tell us where a paper was previously reviewed (and rejected) and (ideally) provide the previous review and a description of how the paper has been updated following that previous review. This will hopefully also reduce the practice of immediately sending paper rejected by Journal A to Journal B. For specialist areas of research with limited numbers of reviewers, it is increasingly easy to spot a rejected paper that has been immediately resubmitted elsewhere. Not reflecting of the reviewer comments and adjusting the paper accordingly, even if the paper was rejected from that previous journal, is disrespectful of the time and effort that the reviewers have devoted to their reviews

and is unlikely to make the reviewers more supportive of the paper when it is submitted, unchanged, to a different outlet.

As noted in Curno's paper, journals are increasingly using copy (plagiarism?) detection software on all submissions. To me, this carries an unreasonable presumption of guilt on the part of authors. It also incurs not insignificant financial and administrative costs in processing all the submissions and reviewing their "plagiarism" scores. These administrative overheads are likely to increase when the majority of journals run submissions through the detection software as many rejected submissions are likely to appear as matches for the submission to the new journal. In such cases, asking authors to provide a full history of the paper will help editors manage the potential matches.

Copy-detection software also frequently picks up poor writing and paraphrasing practices (Hayes *et al.*, 2006). With journal articles, and increasingly books as well, available electronically rather than proper paraphrasing, there is a growing temptation for authors to cut/copy and paste relevant extracts from the source material and only then attempt to re/overwrite them "in their own words". In most cases, authors are unable to do this sufficiently well, and as a result, the sophisticated copy-detection algorithms highlight the text as potential plagiarism cases that need to be investigated by journal editors.

Another area of "tacit" knowledge around academic misconduct and academic writing is the important distinction between accusations of plagiarism and proven cases of plagiarism. Kock (1999) presents his own case where his investigation of alleged plagiarism against the work he had written turned into an allegation that he, in fact, was the plagiariser of the other person's work rather than vice versa.

As Curno's paper notes, the challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era are many and varied. In this paper, I have reviewed one aspect of the problem, namely the challenge of making authors aware of the expectations (and reasons for) full disclosure of their paper's provenance. The use of copy-detection software, intended to address the problem of academic plagiarism, ironically may cause more problems for journal editors in the absence of this provenance information and highlights the need for clear articulation of a journal's expectations that is well understood by authors.

## References

- Collins, H. (2010), *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Curno, M. (2016), "Challenges to ethical publishing in the digital era", *Information, Communication & Ethics in Society*, Vol. 14 No. 1.
- Grey, C. and Sinclair, A. (2006), "Writing differently", *Organization*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 443-453.
- Hayes, N., Whitley, E.A. and Introna, L.D. (2006), "Power, knowledge and management information systems education: the case of the Indian learner", *International Conference on Information Systems*.
- Kock, N. (Ed.) (1999), "A case of academic plagiarism", *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 42 No. 7, pp. 96-104.
- Krasnova, H., Henfridsson, O., Riemenschneider, C., Schäfer, K., Trkman, P., Veltri, N.F. and Whitley, E.A. (2014), "Publication strategy for junior researchers: quantity vs quality, importance of the first authorship and collaboration", *Communications of the Association for Information Systems (CAIS)*, Article 33.

- 
- Samuelson, P. (1994), "Self plagiarism and fair use", *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 37 No. 8, pp. 21-25.
- Willcocks, L.P., Avgerou, C. and Whitley, E.A. (2008), "The ranking of top IS journals: the perspective from the London School of Economics", *European Journal of Information Systems*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 163-168. doi: [10.1057/ejis.2008.9](https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2008.9).
- Worrell, D.L. (2009), "Assessing business scholarship: the difficulties in moving beyond the rigor-relevance paradigm trap", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 127-130.

**Corresponding author**

Edgar A. Whitley can be contacted at: [E.A.Whitley@lse.ac.uk](mailto:E.A.Whitley@lse.ac.uk)

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)