

Author, Reviewer, Editor: A Generative Conversation

Editorial

PAPER PUBLISHED IN THE *Project Management Journal*

PLEASE CITE THIS PAPER AS “Geraldi, J., Locatelli, G., & Söderlund, J. (2025). Author, Reviewer, Editor: A Generative Conversation. *Project Management Journal*, 56(2), 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728251325858> (Original work published 2025)”

Developmental reviewing and beyond

The peer-review system is a foundational institution in most academic work. Dating back to the 1600s, the peer-review system has been critical for developing high-quality research (Carpenter, 2009). The peer-review system has been growing in importance over time, owing not only to the increasing number of submissions to academic journals but also to an increasing diversity of topics and knowledge domains, so editors rely on reviewers to assess manuscripts. Today, the peer-review system is critical for most academic journals, and certainly for the Project Management Journal (PMJ).

Yet, despite its critical role, the peer-review system faces significant challenges that impact all roles in the knowledge production cycle—authors, editors and, of course, reviewers (Mcmullen & Newbert, 2023). Notwithstanding efforts to promote so-called “developmental reviewing” (Lepak, 2007), numerous challenges with the peer-review system continue to persist in management and organization studies (Ellinger et al., 2023). For instance, some authors resist valuable reviewer feedback, leading to rejections of promising manuscripts and wasted effort. Other authors feel “lost in comments” offered by reviewers and editors. Editors, meanwhile, face challenges in recruiting qualified reviewers and when reviews are eventually returned, they indicate a lack of “inter-reviewer alignment” (Söderlund & Bakker, 2014), making it difficult for the editor to reach a decision, and offer clear guidance to authors. Reviewers on the other hand struggle to find time to complete their review assignments in a busy schedule with teaching and increasing administrative burdens.

As PMJ editors, we are working hard to contribute to developing and maintaining an insightful, relevant, and rigorous project scholar community that fosters debate and knowledge growth. Such a community depends on good journals, which in turn rely on a well-functioning peer-review process, and engagement from editors and reviewers. Our journals need to be recognized as rigorous and professional, and famous for publishing good papers within our specialized field and beyond (Locatelli et al., 2023), so that they attract not only submissions from project management narrowly but contributions from any scholar interested in advancing our understanding of projects in society and business and the practice of project management.

To make our journals deliver on such promises, we need to address our ability to secure a “generative conversation,” and a collaboration among editors, authors, and reviewers during the review process. In that respect, the review process could be seen as a “three-way street” (Ellinger et al., 2023) where the respective roles and responsibilities of authors, editors and editorial teams, and reviewers are inextricably linked. Keep in mind that the review process in many cases lasts more than a year from initial submission to acceptance with several rounds of reviews and revisions. Given the challenges we currently face, we need to address and discuss how the conversation could be improved and how it could be made more effective. PMJ should take a leading role in developing our field in this regard, and thereby how we, through better reviewing, contribute to the further development of our field.

Our experience from publishing in the Project Management Journal and other journals points in the same direction. We have all had submissions moving from what we thought were rather good papers, which through the review process were developed into what we (humbly) believe are very good papers (cf. Lenfle and Söderlund, 2025; Clegg & Pollack, 2025)), and papers that improved considerably in the review process. This is, however, a tricky game to play. On the one hand, we want

authors to submit publishable papers that could be “published as-is” (Tsang & Frey, 2008), but we also want authors to develop their papers through the review process – good papers should become even better.

The generative conversation at the Project Management Journal

Our ambition is that all authors who submit their papers to PMJ should feel that their papers have been treated fairly, that the papers have improved during the review process, and that papers have benefitted from the editors' and reviewers' feedback so that the published paper is better than the initial submission. This is the ultimate goal with the peer-review process at PMJ, besides the obvious to ensure that only publishable papers get accepted.

We argue that a generative conversation requires authors, reviewers, and editors to work in unison. They must work together to establish a conversation that moves the paper in the right direction - that makes the paper better. They must also understand and respect their different roles. Understanding these roles, dispelling misconceptions, uncovering genuine motivations, and promoting a developmental approach to peer reviewing is essential, however, we are not only looking upon this as a developmental *review* process, but more so, as something that is a shared responsibility among editors, reviewers, and authors, which could be seen as a knowledge development process that obviously is central to the paper at hand, but which extends beyond that.

As a field of research, project management research and project studies is clearly dependent on publishing good papers that make a difference. As journal editors, we need to make scholars interested in the study of projects and project management and ensure that they submit their best works to our journals. Authors will do that if they feel there is value and recognition in publishing papers in our journals – and if we improve papers submitted to our journals. This is a key issue for the further development of the Project Management Journal: attracting good papers, and making papers even better through the review process.

What then is the key to making papers better through the review process? We believe this boils down to the interaction and conversation between authors, editors, and reviewers – how they can work together to set the direction and improvement potential of the paper. Reflecting on the paper by Söderlund & Bakker (2014) on the state-of-the-art of reviewing in project management ten years ago, one can assume that both reviewer quality needs to be improved, as well as authors' ability to respond to reviewer feedback, not to mention editors' ability to synthesize and develop coherent improvement suggestions. Again, we have the triadic relationship between these three roles to establish a generative conversation that will improve submitted papers.

In this editorial, we therefore reflect on the current state of peer review processes at PMJ and share our endeavors to orchestrate the review process judiciously as a conversation between authors, reviewers, and editors. However, instead of only writing an editorial about reviewing narrowly, about reviewing quality, and about “good reviewing” (Lepak, 2007), and related matters, which has been done earlier (Gerhardt et al., 2019; Söderlund & Bakker, 2014), we wanted to write an editorial that addresses the broader spectrum of matters extending beyond the art of reviewing, and that also addresses the role of the author in this process, not to mention the role of the editor in orchestrating the conversation.

Our goal, with this editorial and various other recent initiatives launched by the PMJ, such as the PMJ College, is to improve the quality of the peer-review system, discuss how we can ensure that the review process contributes to knowledge production and legitimization (Bedeian, 2004), besides its

obvious quality assuring purposes. We here suggest a set of guiding principles of engagement, in total 18 such principles, and in that way offer a nuanced perspective on the review process.

We begin by addressing the role of authors, followed by the role of reviewers, and then editors in maintaining a developmental and high-quality review system. We pinpoint six core principles for each of the roles in the generative conversation for improving submissions. There might certainly be several additional principles of relevance worth highlighting. We see this as a starting point for a debate, and in the present editorial we wanted to highlight the most important ones from our experience as authors, reviewers, and editors, and equally the principles that we believe are particularly important for our field given its current stage of development.

Authors' role in the review process

We will begin by emphasizing the crucial role of the authors in making the review process a generative conversation. We begin with the authors because it is principally the authors who should benefit from such conversation (Ragins, 2015) – who should feel that their paper is improving, that the comments make sense and are moving the paper forward. It is always the authors who ignite the process, who see the potential, who have identified an opportunity, a gap, or a problem with current literature – and it is the authors who “own their ideas” (Tsang & Frey, 2007). We believe there are a set of key principles that authors should consider when engaging in the generative review process.

Principle 1.1: Submit high quality manuscripts that fit the journal yet be open to changing your paper throughout the review process. It is always the authors that set the basis for what we are working with, submitting good papers that reviewers will be interested in reviewing and, of course, good papers that we find likely to publish in our journal. In different previous editorials, we have written about what we believe is required from a paper submitted to the PMJ in terms of framing, rigor, relevance and contribution (e.g. Geraldi, 2021a; 2021b; Geraldi et al., 2024; Locatelli et al., 2023; Müller & Klein, 2018; Müller & Klein, 2019a; 2019b; Söderlund, 2023). We advise any author to read these editorials (and relevant calls for papers) in detail before submitting their manuscript to our journal, as this would make our job a lot easier, and it would also improve authors' chances of getting their papers published. Indeed, good papers will find it easier to survive the review process, good papers will also make our reviewers more willing to provide constructive and high-quality feedback.

It is important to remember that the significance of well-crafted abstracts and titles begins at the moment you submit your manuscript. They not only create the first impression for us, the editors, but also serve as the only information reviewers see before deciding whether to accept or decline the review invitation. A high-quality, thoughtfully written title and abstract are essential for attracting qualified reviewers and increasing the likelihood that they accept the invitation to review your manuscript.

In practical terms, this means that we need to ensure that papers published in our journal have a contribution. This means that editors and reviewers should spot papers that lack novelty, or which offer only minimal and incremental additions to things we already know. This also means that the review process should ensure that papers published in the PMJ are methodologically rigorous, and that they do not contain significant methodological flaws. Papers should after all address topics that are central to our understanding of projects and/or project management. We know that many papers published in the field never get cited and offer limited contribution. This is a key concern for the entire field: we need to ensure that we publish papers that make a difference, that contribute to the

state-of-art within project management and project studies, papers that not only describe and explain *what, how*, but also *why* things occur the way they do in projects (Müller & Klein, 2018). We want to publish papers that are meaningful for the readers.

Principle 1.2: Collaborate with other scholars but maintain responsibility for the published work.

Peer reviewing processes are essential quality gates, aimed to ensure high level quality, yet, there is an invariable information asymmetry between reviewers and editors on the one hand, and authors on the other. More so, contemporary challenges in projects and developing strong submissions often require the efforts from several authors collaborating to ensure high quality in theory, findings, and methods (Liu et al., 2017). Increasing collaboration is a central part of improving the quality of initial submissions and maintaining good momentum throughout the review process. However, there might be challenges with increasing multiple authorship, including the responsibility for data and written text.

Editors and reviewers can hardly spot fabricated data or plagiarism in the form of a paper (or sections of papers), particularly when translated from another language. This is a key responsibility shared by the group of authors. This accentuates the role of the co-authors in detecting flaws in the raw data, as reviewers rarely have access and time to analyze the raw data in detail. We thus encourage authors to only put their name on manuscripts that they have full understanding of and in which they have been actively engaged.

Principle 1.3: Believe in your submission and target the right journal but be prepared with a Plan B if your paper is rejected.

We know that most papers will be rejected. This is the case for the majority of higher-ranked journals today, and also a reality at PMJ. A main reason why papers get rejected is because of lack of fit with the journal, in other cases because reviewers or editors have identified significant shortcomings that might be too substantial to deal within a normal review process (Müller & Klein, 2018). If the issue is with the fit of the journals, the authors can re-submit to another journal, not necessarily of a “lower rank”. For instance, a paper on success factor in building retrofitting projects might not be acceptable for PMJ (old topic and narrow focus) but can be perfect for a leading journal within building engineering (see e.g. Orsatti et al., 2025). In case of significant shortcomings there might be a need for a lengthier rewrite and substantial rethinking, and therefore good reasons why a manuscript would be rejected. Of course, receiving such negative verdicts might be incredibly disappointing also for the seasoned scholar who are well familiar with the nature of the game.

However, we hope that our authors look upon the desk reject decision as an opportunity to explore a different path for their paper – a path that might lead to novel research ideas that could have positive long-term effects (Carpenter, 2009). For that reason, the rejection decision might have a pivotal role in developing a scholar’s research career and providing ideas on new research fields and improved methodological rigor for future studies. As mentioned, even if your paper is rejected, there is much to learn from the review process. Please consider those when revising your manuscript before submitting your paper to another journal.

In addition, we should be reminded that reviewers can be factually wrong. After Einstein published his field-changing paper on relativity theory, several known and less-known scientists reacted to it and wrote against it; a famous case is the publication "Hundert Autoren Gegen Einstein" (One Hundred Authors Against Einstein). We are left wondering what would have happened if those scientists had been the reviewers of his paper. Therefore, authors who get their paper rejected but think that “they are right” should resubmit to another journal, not necessarily of a lower standing. We believe that all authors should have some kind of Plan B – a reject decision might inspire them to

develop the paper and submit it elsewhere. Deborah Dougherty, a leading innovation and organization scholar, addressed this concern when speaking in front of an audience at an Academy of Management session some years ago. She claimed that all her published papers had been rejected at least once. This is comforting for anyone receiving a reject decision. Don't give up!

Principle 1.4: Listen to the feedback, consider the suggestions from the reviewers, but dare to challenge and don't accept things you don't believe in. While pleasing the reviewers is not a goal in itself, we want to urge our authors: *listen to your reviewers*, try to understand their points and work with their comments, explore how those comments and suggestions can improve your paper. Respond to their comments politely and accurately. In your response letter to the reviewers, describe how you have revised the manuscript and responded to the reviewers' comments on a point-by-point basis. For sure, you do not have to agree with your reviewers. If you believe that the reviewer's comments (or one or two of the comments) are irrelevant or disagree with their suggestions, please explain why and how. It is perfectly alright to disagree with your reviewers, and sometimes these disagreements might lead to conversations that trigger new ideas, and clarifications elsewhere in the paper or that they lead to a better overall understanding of how you frame the problem and contribution of the paper. These disagreements might also trigger ideas for the handling editor that could lead to suggestions on improving the paper.

If, after these reflections, you believe there is something wrong with any of your reviews, contact the handling editor. It is rare, but not impossible, that a reviewer might have misunderstood your paper entirely or have some personal issue against the topic you are investigating or the research method adopted. If you believe this is the case, email the editor. As editors, we have the power to "dismiss" irrelevant reviews.

Principle 1.5: Be ready to embark on a learning journey, but do not get lost in comments and suggestions. It is essential to keep an open mind; authors must be willing to learn from their reviewers. Reviewers are often generous with suggestions for literature reading, alternative approaches to consider, theoretical perspectives to review, etc. A lengthy review process will cover several aspects and issues with a paper, some less relevant than others. In some cases, authors might be facing several pages of suggestions from the reviewers and additional ones from the editor. In some cases, these suggestions are highly contradictory. The inter-reviewer alignment (Söderlund & Bakker, 2014) is low, making it difficult to know where to steer the manuscript.

Sometimes, it might be wise to contact the handling editor for suggestions or at least explain the difficulties in the response letter. The letter is in that respect a way to elaborate on how the authors have developed their strategy for the paper and how they have changed the manuscript based on the comments from reviewers. At the same time, the response letter might also be an opportunity to explain why specific changes have *not* been implemented. In many cases, these explanations might open the eyes of the editor and the reviewers, making them aware of why and why not certain decisions were made. We thus would like to tell our authors: Don't give up, and don't lose track!

Moreover, while carefully addressing reviewers' comments, don't lose sight of your paper's core message and contribution to the literature. Reviewer feedback is a valuable gift, but ultimately, it is the authors' responsibility to shape the manuscript into something they are proud of. This becomes especially important as the review process extends over multiple rounds. As revisions accumulate, authors, reviewers, and editors may grow fatigued and settle for a manuscript that, while addressing

all comments and having an important contribution, has become overly long, less sharp, and too apologetic—citing excessive sources and sometimes becoming repetitive or convoluted. In the final stretch, particularly around so-called “conditional acceptance,” authors should take the lead in refining their work. This means carefully improving the writing, eliminating ambiguities, strengthening the core message, and ensuring the paper remains compelling and impactful. So, stay committed to the process—keep refining your work until the very end!

Principle 1.6: Look upon the review process as a generative conversation, seek support in networks and colleagues. To ensure an effective review process, it is crucial to consider how authors approach it and how they react to reviewers’ comments. The editor’s decision letter and synthesis of comments from the reviewers along with the detailed comments from the reviewers are all groundwork to make the manuscript better, to locate the paper in the relevant academic conversation context and debate (Huff, 1998), to make the paper more robust (Daft, 1983), but even more so, to make the contribution strong and compelling (Whetten, 1989). The review process as a generative conversation greatly depends on how authors respond and move the manuscript forward and how authors navigate their paper in this nested terrain.

Our experience is that many authors fail to live up to the comments, seem discouraged, and lose momentum and self-confidence because of critique from editors and reviewers. This is most unfortunate, and something that we need to address. As editors and reviewers, we need to emphasize the central role of local support systems and close colleagues to ensure that authors do not give up but rather grow with the task and get ready for the challenge. Hence, “Revise and Resubmit Seminars” that several research groups in our field rely on is a good way to energize authors to respond to suggestions from editors and reviewers and thereby find a strategy for improving the manuscript.

Reviewers’ role in the review process

Besides the authors, the reviewers play a key role in the review process, and the reviewer's role is perhaps even more critical when reviewing becomes increasingly “developmental” (Ragins, 2017). Participating in the review process is not just a personal development opportunity; it also carries a sense of responsibility and offers a chance to influence the trajectory of one's field (Mcmullen & Newbert, 2023). Reviewers are gatekeepers, yet also those that can make a difference to the paper, that can see potential and difficulties that the authors might have overlooked. Besides that, reviewers play a key role in ensuring good quality in published works, it is equally an important part of the livelihood and conversations within a scientific field (Mcmullen & Newbert, 2023). For project management as a relatively new field of research, the review process is critical as it ensures that people are committed to fostering the growth of the field and ensuring good quality and rigor in the works being published. The review process thus serves a role in nurturing the further development of the field, what we should focus on, what we should emphasize and what we should require from the work that we publish.

There are numerous lists of recommendations produced over the years of what the reviewer need to consider when reviewing a paper of commenting also on the strengths of a paper, of being open to alternative perspectives, of explaining the reasons for concerns, of being thorough, of being encouraging and respectful (e.g. McMullen & Newbert, 2023). Our point here is to highlight a few additional guiding principles that seem particularly important in light of the generative conversation addressed here.

Principle 2.1: Take your job seriously and accept review assignments for those papers you believe for which you can contribute. Indeed, most of our reviewers take their review assignments very seriously and do an excellent job overall. However, it is worth reminding everyone that authors might have spent several years researching and then writing the submitted paper. A submitted paper deserves the full attention and professionalism of everybody, including the reviewers. We want our reviewers to accept only review invitations for papers they are knowledgeable about, align with the authors in terms of their onto-epistemological stance and believe they can make a constructive contribution.

However, a reviewer does not necessarily have to be familiar with the same research questions, they could be familiar with the paper's topic or the methodology, and from that angle make a difference in the review process. It should also be mentioned that sometimes the point of inviting someone as a reviewer is to get new ideas and new input. Editors might want to get different views on a manuscript or an inside view on a narrower aspect of the paper, for instance the use of a particular methodology or the use of a specific concept. So, as reviewers we also want to say, look pragmatically at your review. You do not have to cover every little single part of the paper but focus on the parts where you believe you have best knowledge, and trust the review process. So, for instance, if you are an expert of the subject, but not the method, explicitly say this to the authors and the editors, so we know that you did not comment on the method section, not because it is fine, but because you did not have the necessary competence to assess such method. You will be one of several scholars, and to some extent you are one of several in a team that works to help improve the paper.

Principle 2.2: Be critical, yet constructive, polite and responsible. There has been an overall assumption that if you know how to write, you will also know how to review. This is not necessarily the case. Many of us have unfortunately had the experience of receiving low-quality reviews, and sometimes even aggressive ones. We need to remind our reviewers and ourselves to always be polite and professional even if the paper has factual mistakes and substantial shortcomings.

Moreover, don't take advantage of your role as a reviewer; for instance, do not ask authors to quote your papers unless it really makes a positive difference for the paper, and certainly do not steal their ideas. Moreover, as a reviewer, your role is to advise on the development of the paper, not to reshape it to align with your own approach or perspective on the topic. You should not attempt to alter the paper's core argument or contribution just because it clashes with yours. For example, if the manuscript presents valid and well-argued criticism of your work or research you identify with, resist the urge to ask the authors to change it. Instead, challenge them to strengthen their argument, encouraging a more robust discussion. Embrace the exchange of ideas rather than stifling it—intellectual debate is at the heart of academic progress.

Moreover, be constructive; for instance, instead of saying X is wrong because of Y, say X might be wrong because of Y. A way to improve and make it right is Z. Suggest useful references and reasonable suggestions and solutions. There are plenty of resources and guidelines how a reviewer can think about the review assignment, how reviewing can be made effective, etc. and we recommend our reviewers to care about their own development as reviewers of manuscripts – it is certainly an important part of the job – that needs to be developed and enhanced (see e.g., Tsui & Hollenbeck, 2009).

Principle 2.3: Approach the review assignment with an open mind; also the reviewers can learn a lot from the review process. Engaging in the review process allows individuals to contribute to shaping the intellectual landscape and further developing our field. As Thomas Kuhn (1970)

seminally demonstrated, the review process can act as a gatekeeper, perpetuating the status quo, pushing normal science and delaying paradigm shifts. In contrast, reviewers with an open mind can help instill dialogue and shake taken-for-granted knowledge (see the example above regarding Albert Einstein). Therefore, by critically evaluating and constructively developing the work of others, reviewers play a vital role in maintaining the standards and pushing the boundaries of knowledge within their discipline (Ragins, 2018).

However, by maintaining an open mind, and reading the other reviewers' comments, contemplating how the editors have made their decision, how they synthesize different viewpoints, taking part in the review process may offer reviewers much food for thought, and help reviewers to become also better authors, by learning not only to take a critical stance on your own writing by doing reviews, but also reading about the constructive comments of other reviewers, and how they take on the task and see the paper. We view such insights to be a quality indicator also for PMJ – reviewers should feel that they take part in something that matters, that makes a difference – and something that they can learn from, and thereby that they feel they want to be part of the process. Reviewing in that sense is a collective process that is important for maintaining a lively academic debate about key issues in our field.

Principle 2.4: Look for opportunities, help unleash the potential of a manuscript. Reviewers maintain an influential role that has sometimes been abused and overused to promote one's work or prevent alternative views from emerging (Lewin, 2014). In either case, the reviewer has a task to evaluate the manuscript regarding its relevance, contribution, and methodological rigor. The evaluative approach is one part of the review process that should support the editor in making wise publication decisions. However, what gets overlooked is that "Editors are in the business of publishing, not rejecting, manuscripts" (Schminke, 2002, p. 489). Indeed, as Lepak (2009) suggests whilst being the editor of the *Academy of Management Review*, "the goal [of editors] is to publish innovative, provocative, exciting, and thoughtful contributions that extend what we know or that change how we think about organizational phenomena" (Lepak, 2009: 376). Reviewers should help editors make decisions about the manuscripts and develop manuscripts into well-crafted scholarly contributions.

While an evaluative approach remains prevalent, a noteworthy shift is exemplified by journals such as the *Academy of Management Review* (Ragins, 2017), which actively advocates for a "developmental approach" to the reviewing process. Carpenter (2009) even ascribes the reviewer to the role of a "mentor." In this progressive paradigm, the role of reviewers extends beyond mere identification of weaknesses; it is fundamentally about uncovering "gems" to help unleash the manuscript's full potential. The emphasis here lies in collaboratively teasing out and refining these notable elements of the manuscript. If, at the outset, no such gems emerge during the first rounds of review — perhaps an intriguing angle supported by extensive empirical data—we will suggest rejection of the manuscript as soon as we can see that further work is likely to be not more than waste of time as the paper is likely to be rejected eventually.

Conversely, when "gems in the rough" are identified, the ethos shifts towards belief in the article's potential, offering a chance for collaborative development. This transformative perspective fosters an environment where the focus is not solely on critique but on cultivating and enhancing the manuscript's scholarly and theoretical contribution. This, of course, should not be a guarantee for publication after the first rounds of reviews, but a commitment to help the development of the paper and an invitation for authors to dedicate their time and energy to craft and push their publications forward. Therefore, authors should remember that passing the first round is not a

guarantee that the paper will be accepted. This was not the case in the past; it will probably be even less so in the future.

Principle 2.5: Focus on the important points – and make them clear. As mentioned, reviews have the dual purpose of being evaluative – and developmental. The evaluative part has a separate section in the reviewing process where reviewers are asked about giving any confidential comments to the editors. Here, they can expand on their review comments and related matters that might be difficult to convey in the review report to the authors. For instance, if the reviewer has ethical concerns (data fabrication, plagiarism etc.), confidential comments to editors is a good place for flagging them. We will then take the required corrective measures as indicated in our past editorials on plagiarism and self-plagiarism (Geraldi, 2021a; Geraldi, 2021b).

To ensure focus on essential pieces, it might be preferable to focus on the overall contribution and strengths of the paper rather than a plethora of comments on paragraphs that might be deleted in the next round anyway. This is especially relevant in the first round of reviews. It might make more sense to concentrate on one key point addressing the introduction and framing of the paper, another one on the theory, one point on methodology, one on findings, and then one on the paper's contribution (Tsui & Hollenbeck, 2009).

Our experience confirms that it is better to focus on a few points – and make those very clear to the authors, rather than offering a long list of remarks where it might be difficult for both the editor and the authors to know which points are the most significant. It is advisable to divide your points into Major points and Minor points. It is also essential to consider that as a reviewer, you are one of several and working with an editor who will also assess the paper. Sometimes, the idea of selecting different reviewers might be to form a team that complements the editor and adds capabilities and perspectives that the editor might lack. The point is to gather a good team of reviewers to ensure that the paper is assessed from multiple perspectives, ranging from different theoretical viewpoints and methodological approaches. Consider that each reviewer highlights between three and five main points, then the editor will hopefully have some kind of overlap in the assessment of the paper to be able to summarize a total of 5-7 key issues that need to be addressed in a revised version, which might be more than enough to handle for the authors anyway.

Principle 2.6: Look upon the review process as a generative conversation. The way we see reviewing is that it is a conversation between the reviewers, the authors, and the editors. In that respect, we share the reviewers' comments among the reviewers; we emphasize the importance of the decision letter as this gives the editor a chance to say how they have interpreted the reviewers' comments and how they match with their own reading of the paper. We always emphasize the importance of editors reading the paper in detail and making their own judgments before reading the reviewers' comments, and this is something that all actors involved could learn from.

The editors also read and integrate the reviewers' comments in the decision letter. Synthesizing sometimes contrasting reviewer suggestions is very difficult. The decision letter thus serves an important role in summarizing the key points from the editors' reading of the paper, the editors' reading of the reviewers' comments, and the actual review comments. Sharing these different comments with the reviewers is integral to learning and development. As a reviewer, especially the less experienced ones, you want to learn from more experienced scholars, editors, and the assessments from other reviewers. This ensures that reviewing is not only a service to the authors but also crucial for improving the analytical abilities of our reviewers and, thereby, scholars who submit papers to our journal.

Finally, dear reviewer, you are not alone. You know the name of the editor that assigned the review to you. If you have any issue or concern, being that scientific, ethical or you are just late because an unexpected workload or life event, please contact your editor. We are here to help and grow together.

Editors' role in the review process

So far, we have emphasized the role that authors and reviewers have in the review process. This is a common focus in current debate (Lepak, 2007). We believe that the editor has an equally important role, and indeed, it is the editor who should be able to change the process, steer the review process, and orchestrate in a way to ensure good quality of review and good quality of published papers. Given the considerable emphasis on the reviewer's role in prior debate, perhaps the editor's role is sometimes taken for granted or overlooked (Ragins, 2018). As authors, we notice a difference in how editors take on their assignment, primarily in how they read and engage with the paper, and equally how they synthesize the comments from the reviewers. Sometimes editors merely pass on the reviewer comments and suggestions and engage very little in the actual paper, which was an observation addressed in the study by Söderlund & Bakker (2014). In other cases, editors are very active and heavily involved in synthesizing and adding their suggestions. The latter seems to be very much the common approach among those journals that have worked with the developmental approach and establishing a "developmental editorial culture" (Ragins, 2018).

At PMJ, we want our editors to be active in the review process and help authors navigate it. We want them to form their own opinion about the paper and use the reviewers' comments to guide the authors in identifying the alternatives to improve their manuscripts. We believe that highlighting key principles for editors is central since many of us act as editors, associate editors, and even more of us serve on guest editorial teams, which is often the first step among junior scholars to build their editorial career. There are several principles that we believe are critical to ensure that the role of the editor works well and that the editor ensures a generative conversation and developmental editorial culture.

Principle 3.1: Ensure authors understand the journal's context and focus. It is important that editors and the journal have communicated what kind of papers they are interested in, what topics they favor, and if they have any other specific requirements on papers submitted to the journal, for instance, in terms of methodologies, theory, or contributions. Many journals reject papers because they lack fit with the journal at hand.

Prior editorials in the PMJ where editors reflect on the trajectory of the journal and the questions that they believe are essential are important here (Klein & Müller, 2022). For special issues, we have specific call for papers to ensure that authors know what requirements are posed on submitted papers (e.g., Whyte et al., 2025; Holzmann et al., 2025). We also organize several Meet the Editors' sessions at conferences and elsewhere, where we introduce the focus of the journal and explicate particularly important topics and requirements that authors should be aware of before submitting. We have also recently asked our guest editors of special issues to participate in webinars where they present the focus and rationale of the special issue for potential authors and where authors can ask questions about topics or other related issues.

Editors thus have a key responsibility to explain to potential authors the topics and requirements for submitted works. This will help the authors write submissions that would fit the journal and avoid

unnecessary critique from the reviewer, which could quickly have been taken care of even before the submission was prepared.

Principle 3.2: Read the paper in detail and independently of the reviewers. Even if you would have the best reviewers involved who would provide you with very clear advice on the decision to be taken, it is still crucial that the handling editor reads the paper. There are many reasons why. The reviewers might have missed a central weakness or completely overlooked a promising option that could move the paper in a very different direction and make a much more substantial contribution.

The role of the editor is to make tough decisions, and sometimes that decision will be at odds with the reviewers. The editor might disagree with the reviewers and would like to see particular types of papers published or papers addressing certain topics, which the reviewers sometimes may oppose. In such situations, it is particularly important that editors dare to make decisions and provide the rationale for their decisions to both authors and the reviewers. The same would happen if reviewers failed to do their job. In those cases, editors should add their suggestions and ensure that the paper meets the quality criteria of the journal.

Principle 3.3: Reject papers that you are certain will never get pass the first stage of the blind review process. We believe it might sometimes be better to give authors the chance to submit their work to other journals with a better fit. In that respect, it might be wise to make desk reject decisions quickly and firmly, rather than to drag on an inevitable desk reject decision. There will always be a risk that an editor will reject a paper that should have been published, however, given the number of journals of good quality today, also in the project management field, good papers will likely be published in the end elsewhere, despite receiving a desk reject decision from one of the journals.

Here we should emphasize that editors may risk making two types of errors, as the former editor of the International Journal of Project Management pointed out. One error relates to accepting papers that should have been rejected, whereas the other problem relates to rejecting papers that should have been accepted. As for the latter error, there are alternative options, and other journals that will hopefully not make the same error.

Principle 3.4: Select the right reviewers, give them clear instructions about reviewing, and give them sufficient time for doing the review. There is clearly a need to discuss how we can ensure that scholars who are experts in our field continue to review papers for the PMJ and that people who publish in the PMJ also will be willing to review, helping others to get their papers improved – and published. If the process is going to work, we need authors publishing in the PMJ and contributing by reviewing the work of others interested in publishing in our journal. We expect that scholars submitting to our journal and authors publishing in our journal also support our journal as reviewers. This is a critical component of the entire review system and something to which we hope our authors are committed.

Having several reviewers to choose from is essential to find the right ones. As an editor, it is important to select reviewers who you believe would enjoy the paper, who would do a good job recommending a wise decision, and who could offer constructive feedback that could advance the paper towards publication. In that respect, it might be important not to send too many papers to the same reviewer but spread the review assignments more evenly within the network of reviewers. This further emphasizes the importance of maintaining a network of reviewers and a strong and supportive editorial board.

Principle 3.5: Work with the process and allow sufficient time for revisions. The review process is always interesting and instrumental – also for us as editors. One reviewer might ask for minor

modifications and believe the paper is very close to publication. The two other reviewers might offer more critical remarks, pointing out a need for more substantial changes. The editor would then, if the points from the more critical reviewers are relevant and well-founded, decide to invite the authors to submit a revised version – a major revision.

When we receive the new version, the handling editor begins by reading the paper and ensuring the authors have written a response letter explaining the changes in further detail. If the editor believes that the paper has been improved and the main points have been addressed, the editor sends it to a second round of reviews to the same reviewers. Even though the old reviewers might decline the invitation to review, our policy is to send it to the same reviewers. The same process as for the first round would then be repeated, but hopefully the reviewers would recognize the improvements and thus suggest either an accept decision or a minor revision. The handling editor reads the review reports and makes the decision. The authors would thus, in case of a minor revision decision, be given 30 days to submit a new version. Again, sticking to the deadline is critical, but it happens that authors might ask for an extension. Normally, we are generous about this (unless it is a special issue with pressing deadlines), but again, we encourage authors to deliver on time since we know how important it is to have reviewers stay in the loop.

Principle 3.6: Focus on the big picture, ensure that the paper is moving in the right direction, and provide guidance to the authors. An essential task of the editor is to ensure that reviewers are moving the paper in the right direction – that comments are making sense and that they contribute to strengthening the quality of the paper. Reviewers assist editors in making a decision about the paper; they are not the decision makers. We believe it is important that editors not only read the paper and make their own opinion about it, but they would also need to synthesize the different comments and remarks from the reviewers. In that respect, the editor must point out the highlights from the reviewers, besides offering their evaluation of the paper. It is important that editors therefore write a decision letter that will give the authors a solid understanding of the publishing decision and provide them with clear advice on what you believe is particularly important when revising the paper.

Changes in the editorial team and the editorial board

Following on our ambition to be a leading journal in project management, project studies, and beyond, we need to expand our editorial team and ensure that we have the right people ready to review papers submitted to our journal. This requires editors that are willing and able to do the work and make the right decisions, and reviewers who are committed to contributing to the development of the papers in our review process. Therefore, we are happy to invite one new associate editor, Jeffrey K. Pinto, and several new members to our editorial board.

Jeff Pinto published his first significant papers in the 1980s, and he has been a key figure in the project management domain for the past 40 years. His achievements are outstanding. Jeff is one of the most influential scholars in the field of project management with numerous high-impact papers. He is a former editor-in-chief of the Project Management Journal and has unique experience from serving as editor for journals, special issues, and numerous books. We are grateful that he wants to join the team of editors and help us take the next step in defining and developing the field of project management research and project studies.

PMJ has a dedicated editorial board with approximately 60 members. We are happy to announce several new members in our editorial board. Many of them have been playing key roles in helping us

review papers in the past and appointing them as members of the editorial review board is a way of recognizing their service to the journal and strengthening our ties with them, making sure that they are committed in taking the journal forward, and in helping us publish even better papers. Among the new members of our editorial board, we have a mix of senior, middle career, and junior, high potential scholars. We welcome them onboard. We are truly grateful for the service that they provide to the journal, and their ongoing support that they give to our authors and readers.

- Marina Bos de Vos, TU Delft
- Juliano Denicol, University College London
- Mats Engwall, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm
- Daniel Hall, TU Delft
- Vered Holzmann, Tel Aviv University
- Sylvain Lenfle, CNAM, Paris
- Christoph Loch, Cambridge University
- Stephan Manning, University of Sussex
- Luigi Mosca, Imperial College, London
- Verena Stingl, Aalborg University
- Virpi Turkulainen, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
- Matthias Wenzel, University of Lunenburg
- Xinyue Zhang, University of Sydney

The idea we have is that scholars to begin submitting their papers to our journal because they want to engage in conversations about core topics within project studies and about challenges associated with managing and organizing contemporary projects. They should expect to get rigorous reviews when submitting their manuscript to the PMJ, from editors who are engaged and knowledgeable, editors who are interested in moving the paper forward and improving the logic and writing of the paper. PMJ should be the best journal for anyone interested in improving their manuscripts toward publication and the best for making wise decisions on publication.

Moreover, we want to emphasize that those who review regularly for our journal should get some kind of tangible recognition for their work. One such recognition for good service to the journal is to become a member of the editorial board. We currently need approximately 60 editorial board members, each taking on at least three papers per year as part of their board membership. We try to make sure that at least one of our editorial board members reviews the papers that are sent out for review. This ensures consistency and quality.

Being a member of the PMJ editorial board should be an honor. Becoming an editorial board member is typically an appointment that we give to someone who publishes regularly in the journal, or journals of similar or higher standing. More so, they should have demonstrated that they can review papers for the journal. We look at the reviewing history, the quality of the reviews, and, of course, the quality of their papers when appointing someone to the editorial board.

Once on the editorial board, we hope those members keep their role for at least three years. In some cases, people might stick around for longer. It is up to the journal editors to decide, and of course, it also depends on whether the person is still interested in serving on the board. Some of our editorial board members have been sitting on the board for more than 10 years, reviewing (with consistent outstanding quality) more than three papers per year. We are incredibly grateful for the work that they have done. We would never have been able to develop the journal to where it is today without the continuing support from our editorial board members.

We usually recruit new editors from our editorial board. We are happy to see that we have, in the last five years, been able to recruit five new editors from our editorial board to become associate editors. Being part of a group of editors is a significant responsibility, but it is also extremely rewarding. The editors for the journal meet regularly to discuss trends in the field, experiences from publishing, lessons learned from being an editor, experiences from engaging in review work, etc. In a few words, editors are there to make PMJ even better. Some of our editors have recently started their appointment, whereas others have served as editors for over ten years. We are incredibly proud and happy to have this group of people working for the journal, helping the journal to grow and improve, helping the field to develop and improve.

Supporting reviewers moving forward

Without repeating what has been stated earlier, we are eager to make the review process more efficient and effective while allowing for the conversation that we believe is so central to advance the field and make it more interesting to publish the best work in our journals. Hazen et al. (2016: 623) offered a concrete five step-model to ensuring outstanding reviews, and we here formulate some of their key steps adjusted to the Project Management Journal.

- Step 1: authors submit their best research to PMJ;
- Step 2: editors promptly assess fit and initial quality of submissions and send the best work to reviewers;
- Step 3: since reviewing is an implicit duty of the profession, reviewers accept the invitation without delay and then follow through, providing a timely, thorough, and constructive review;
- Step 4: editors then compile reviews, synthesize the main points by reviewers, write up their assessment and summary, and make a decision that provides constructive feedback and clear guidance to authors;
- Step 5: authors respond thoroughly and expeditiously to suggestions from editor and reviewers and submit a revised manuscript which moves rapidly through the review process (p. 623).

Publishers are pulling resources together intending to inform reviewers about the reviewing process, like Sage's Journal Reviewer Gateway (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal-reviewer-gateway>), which offers videos and guidelines for reviewers. Yet, journals and academic communities vary, and such generic efforts might not be well-suited for all fields. There have been some conversations about reviewing around a decade ago in management and organization studies, and at the Academy of Management has been leading the way in this regard, publishing a wide range of editorials on the subject, addressing manuscript format, writing, publishing, and reviewing in their main journals the Academy of Management Journal and the Academy of Management Review. For instance, Carpenter (2009) and, more recently, Ragins (2017) have been, likewise, pushing the envelope in reviewing. Not surprisingly, the website of the Academy of Management offers more tailored principles for reviewers: <https://aom.org/research/publishing-with-aom/reviewer-resources>. Resources are available; we 'just' need to use them, and we will only be able to do so when we re-establish the reviewer's role as a legitimate and important part of the academic knowledge production system. We need to give it more visibility and expect excellent work as we do in our publications.

For PMJ, we certainly hope that you will accept your next reviewer invitation, work with us, and support our authors in moving project studies forward and ensuring that we publish good papers – and better papers. We rely on our reviewers to engage authors in the generative collaboration needed for good reviewing. We have moved further towards developmental reviewing – and for this to work we need to move quickly. We will do more on this in the year to come. We have the responsibility to make decisions swiftly, ensure that our review system works well, and that our reviewers deliver on time.

In the developmental review process, we should expect that a significant number of papers will require major revision, but we do not want papers getting stuck in the major revision trap; we are expecting our editors to make tough decisions and either reject papers after the first round, or move the paper to a minor revision stage, clearly pointing out the changes and improvements needed. All in all, it should be able to get a paper accepted within 12 months from first submission. That is the gold standard we hope to set for the PMJ together with our authors and reviewers.

References

- Bedeian, A. G. (2004). Peer review and the social construction of knowledge in the management discipline. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 3(2), 198-2015.
- Bedeian, A. G., D. D. Van Fleet & H. H. Human III (2007). Scientific achievement and editorial board membership. *Organizational Research Methods*.
- Carpenter, M. A. (Ed.). (2009). Editor's comments: Mentoring colleagues in the craft and spirit of peer review. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(2), 191-195.
- Ellinger, A. D., P. Jonsson, K. Chapman & A. E. Ellinger (2023). The ideal review process is a three-way street. *Human Resource Development Review*, 22(2), 251–274.
- Geraldi, J. (2021a). Plagiarism in project studies. *Project Management Journal*. 52(1), 3-10.
- Geraldi, J. (2021b). Self-plagiarism in project studies. *Project Management Journal*. 52(2), 119-126.
- Geraldi, J., Locatelli, G., G. Dei, J. Söderlund & S. Clegg (2024). AI for Management and Organization Research: Examples and Reflections from Project Studies. *Project Management Journal*. 55(4), 339-4.
- Gerhardt, M. W., S. D. Charlier & D. Greenberg (2019). AMLE reviewer resource library: A collection of recommended pieces on developmental reviewing. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. 18(1), 7-10.
- Hazen, B. T., Fawcett, S. E., Ogden, J. A., Autry, C. W., Richey, R. G., & Ellinger, A. E. (2016). Addressing a broken peer review process. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*, 27(3), 622–628.
- Houry, D., S. Green & M. Callaham (2012). Does mentoring new peer reviewers improve review quality? A randomized trial. *BMC Medical Education*. 12, 83.
- Klein, G. & R. Müller (2022). Getting past the editor's desk. *Project Management Journal*. 53(6), 543-546.
- Lepak, D. (2009). Editor's comments: What is good reviewing? *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 375-381.

- Lewin, A. Y. (2014). The peer-review process: The good, the bad, the ugly, and the extraordinary. *Management and Organization Review*, 10(2), 167-173.
- Liu, C., C. Olivola & B. Kovács (2017). Coauthorship trends in the field of management: Facts and perceptions. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 16(4), 509-530.
- Müller, R. & Klein, G. (2019a). Qualitative research submissions to *Project Management Journal*. 50(1).
- Müller, R. & Klein, G. (2019b). Quantitative research submissions to *Project Management Journal*. 50(3).
- Orsatti, C., Cuzzocrea, M., De Poli, A. & Locatelli (2025). Towards net-zero: Success factors of tertiary building energy efficiency retrofitting projects. *Journal of Building Engineering*. 103, 112087.
- Ragins, B. R. (2015): Editor's comments: Developing our authors. *Academy of Management Review*. 40(1), 1-8.
- Ragins, B. R. (2017). Editor's comments: Raising the bar for developmental reviewing. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(4), 573-576.
- Ragins, B. R. (2018). From boxing to dancing: Creating a developmental editorial culture. *Journal of Management Inquiry*. 27(2), 158-163.
- Söderlund, J. (2023). Seven insights into becoming an engaged project scholar. *Project Management Journal*. 54(5), 1-7.
- Söderlund, J. & R. Bakker (2014): The case for good reviewing, *International Journal of Project Management*. Vol. 32, No. 1: 1-6.
- Treviño, L. K. (2008). Editor's comments: Why review? Because reviewing is a professional responsibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 8–10.
- Tsang, E. W. K. & B. S. Frey (2007). The As-Is Journal Review Process. Let authors own their ideas. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. 6(1), 128-136.
- Tsui, A. & J. R. Hollenbeck (2009). Successful authors and effective reviewers: Balancing supply and demand in the organizational sciences. *Organizational Research methods*. 12(2), 259-275.