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Editorial: State and direction of the journal, 2013☆,☆☆

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ABSTRACT

Technological Forecasting & Social Change is enjoying rapid growth in both its manuscript submission rate and its impact factor. These trends imply changes in the way editorial processes and decisions will be carried out. This editorial details these changes, with the aim of helping authors, reviewers and readers understand the new directions.

1. Introduction: TFSC and you – 2013 and onward

Our journal is currently shaped by twin forces of increasing citations and skyrocketing manuscript submissions. This editorial explains implications for authors, reviewers, and readers. It answers questions such as: What kinds of papers will be accepted? What additional things do authors need to know about manuscript preparation, and about navigating Elsevier's electronic editing system (EES)? How are guidelines for reviewers evolving? What other trends will affect the TFSC community?

2. Impact factor and submission rate

TFSC's 2012 impact factor was 2.106. This, we believe, is an all-time high for our journal. It is something to be proud of, and the high impact factor[1] (featured prominently on TFSC's home page[2]) is attracting a greater number of worthy article submissions.

That said, the Advisory Board and I agree we should not obsess about impact factor, nor should we accept articles mainly on their potential to generate citations. The most highly cited articles are not necessarily the ones that best serve the progress of our field, nor (necessarily) the ones that best serve policy making [1,2]. We will continue to publish papers that most effectively advance the stated mission of the journal.

I endorse the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)'s[3] recommendation that researchers and those who evaluate researchers "[should] not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions."

We're all aware that focusing exclusively on any one measure — "teaching to the test" — can compromise overall quality, in any endeavor. Perhaps especially in the technology futures game, a paper may prove to be very important in the long run — more than five years from now — but fail to draw citations next year. A paper suggesting how TF methodologies will adapt to the fundamentally new phenomenon of nanotech-biotech convergence, for example, might be immensely important yet draw few citations in the near term.

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[1] For a definition of impact factor, see http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/editorshome.editors/biblio?utm_source=ESJ001&utm_campaign=&utm_content=&utm_medium=email&bid=7EM8D6F:P8IKB5F.

[2] www.elsevier.com/locate/techfore.

[3] http://elsevierconnect.com/san-francisco-declaration-on-researc2h-assessment-dora-elseviers-view/.

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2.1. Submission rate

The number of papers submitted to TFSC continues to skyrocket; I expect more than six hundred this year. (We received 463 manuscripts in 2012.) Contrast this with 2007, when we published about 81 of the 250 papers submitted. The acceptance rate then was thus 81/250 = 32%. We rejected 169 papers.

Due to expanded page allowances awarded to us by Elsevier, we now publish approximately 108 papers/year. Publishing 108 of the 600 papers we expect in 2013 will give us an acceptance rate of 18%, which is a highly desirable one for a journal of TFSC's stature.[4]

However, it will obviously require that we be tough and even heartless in reviewing papers, while doing our best to remain fair.

My sincere thanks to dedicated board members and reviewers for helping deal with this sharply increased volume of incoming manuscripts. With a thousand papers processed since I became Editor-in-Chief, only about three authors are truly angry with me. You've helped me keep this ratio manageable!

2.2. Implications for TFSC's positioning

With regard to the impact factor, one Board member raised the interesting notion that if too many journals cite TFSC papers, it would be a sign that TFSC is becoming a general management journal, rather than serving its traditional niche. To an extent, this is inevitable. As technology comes to pervade every aspect of our work life, public life, and private life, all management becomes technology management. TFSC has become an "A" journal in many universities, especially in Europe and Asia, in part for this reason. However, the point is well taken, as regards the challenge of maintaining a distinctive positioning for the journal.

Papers that are too narrow in scope help neither the field (of technology assessment and forecasting) nor the impact factor. One Board member advocates rejecting such papers in favor of papers of broader conceptual scope, which might not be heavily cited in the short term. Another member argues that publishing papers that are too broad in scope vitiates the focus of the journal. The upshot: Let's strive for the right balance.

3. What kinds of papers will we accept?

In order to avoid being overwhelmed by manuscript submissions, our doctrine will be: Accept high-quality papers that are important, rather than papers that are simply interesting and technically accurate.

Generally, our reviewers will reject:

- Articles that lack a technological focus and some measure of future-orientation, or fail to relate technological innovation(s) to social impacts.
- Articles that are technically correct but not important. This includes articles that are very incremental, e.g. increasing the precision of a measurement by 1/1000% without increasing our understanding or affecting our decision to use that measurement rather than another.
- Articles that are outside the journal's scope (technology assessment & forecasting). However, reviewers may exercise judgment here, as we are an interdisciplinary journal.
- Articles that primarily attempt to define, redefine, or shore up disciplinary boundaries, rather than solve a real problem — e.g., articles claiming entrepreneurship was always part of economics, or that technology management is a part of strategy studies.
- Articles that are too narrow in application (e.g., all experimental subjects were US sophomore psychology majors, or SME metal-bending companies in western Australia), implying limited reader interest and/or small chance of transfer or generalization of results. Again, there is scope for judgment, as we are an international journal and want to encourage participation from diverse locales.
- Articles that are overly focused on theory, as a sole-source for hypotheses, as the be-all and end-all of science, etc. Published TFSC articles generally take the engineering approach: Tools, methods, practice, with appropriate use of theory. That is, hypotheses may arise equally from gaps in theory, or from observation of real-world phenomena.
- Articles that present solutions looking for problems.
- Articles written in unclear or ungrammatical English. Readers and Board members emphasize that "adequate" English is not good enough. TFSC papers must be highly readable.
- Articles that clearly indicate the author did not read the TFSC Guidelines for Authors.

Reviewers will be especially careful of (but not necessarily reject out of hand):

- Articles that rely on methodologies our board members have expressed skepticism about: SEM, PLS, and other latent-variable methods; grounded theory; and simulations that are prone to GIGO. Some of these papers are closely reasoned and can be very good. Others, that rely uncritically on the output of LISREL or Vensim, for example, are probably not keepers.[5]
- Submissions from countries where plagiarism is known to be a common practice.

The academic world is currently experiencing a number of intellectual crises. The foundations of Economics (Economics in Crisis - *Project Syndicate*), Strategy (What Killed Michael Porter's Monitor Group? - *Forbes*), Psychology (Fraud Scandal Fuels Debate Over Practices of Social Psychology - *Chronicle of*

[4] A 20% acceptance rate would still position us as a journal of very high quality. However, this would require publishing more than our usual nine issues per year. Supplementary issues are possible, but they must be financially sponsored — by a disinterested party, of course.

[5] SEM: Structural Equation Modeling. PLS: Partial Least Squares. GIGO: Garbage In, Garbage Out. No criticism of the LISREL or Vensim software is intended; however, the researcher, and not the software, must drive the research process. Computer output without incisive human interpretation is not sufficient, and yet our Board members feel that several latent-variable methods depend excessively on (sometimes undisciplined) researcher interpretation. Thus this is another area in which judicious balance is sought.