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A Call for Action and Reflection

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Editorial

Self-Plagiarism in Project Studies: A Call for Action and Reflection

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Introduction

As Callahan (2018) states, "whether a real issue of ethical concern or a moral panic, self-plagiarism has captured the attention of authors, editors, publishers, and plagiarism-detection software companies" (p. 306), and has led to fierce debates on the judgment of fair reuse of one's own work. This editorial will revisit these debates and explain the views and expectations of the *Project Management Journal® (PMJ)*. This is part of a series of editorials designed to guide future submissions to *PMJ* and inform project scholars about relevant topics related to the craft of research. Here, we discuss the concept of *self-plagiarism* and its institutionalization. We, the editorial board of *PMJ,* then propose the four principles we will use to judge self-plagiarism: ownership, honesty, originality, and academic citizenship. These principles build on our discussions about plagiarism (Geraldi, In Press). We encourage authors, reviewers, and readers to engage with the principles to help us in the prevention of and response to cases of self-plagiarism.

Self-Plagiarism: What is in the Name?

Self-plagiarism is generally considered a type of plagiarism as it also involves the reuse of previously published work. However, while plagiarism is an act of academic misconduct defined as the theft of words, ideas, and representation (Geraldi, In Press), self-plagiarism is neither misconduct (ORI, 2020) nor theft, as one cannot steal from oneself. Thus, plagiarism and self-plagiarism are two distinct academic conducts that deserve independent labels (e.g., Callahan, 2018;

Horbach & Halffman, 2019b; Robinson, 2014). Using different labels is an important tool in distinguishing among the severity, motives, mechanisms, detection of, and response to plagiarism and self-plagiarism (Callahan, 2018), particularly as these types of academic conducts receive similar treatment in copyright law and in plagiarism detection services.

However, while having distinct labels is useful, the label usually suggested is *text recycling* (e.g., Callahan, 2018; Horbach & Halffman, 2019b; Robinson, 2014), which restricts the practice to text and is often defined as "the reuse of one's own writing in academic publications, ranging from a sentence to several pages or even entire articles, without reference" (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b, p. 492). However, the reuse of ideas, representations, and data is equally relevant. We therefore extend the concept to include the reuse of an author's prior work—be it text, ideas, representations, or data—and we have termed the practice *manuscript recycling*.

Principles for Judging Manuscript Recycling

One response to manuscript recycling has been the institutionalization of publication ethics guides across disciplines (Callahan, 2018). According to Horbach and Halffman (2019b), one of the triggers for this institutionalization was the high-profile case of manuscript recycling by the renowned and respected economist Peter Nijkamp in 2013. Professor Nijkamp published in peer-reviewed journals at a rate of 1.5 papers per week for several years. One investigation examined 261 of over 2,300 of his publications and identified significant and uncited overlaps in more than 60 publications. Peter Nijkamp was judged guilty of manuscript recycling, but the allegations were dropped because this practice was common among economists and not regulated at the time[1]. The case raised debates on the boundaries of fair reuse of text and led to the development of manuscript recycling policies. Callahan examined this tendency and suggested that "a dominant player in the viral spread of the concept [self-plagiarism] was the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which was founded in 1997 by editors of medical journals (Yentis, 2010). Now, with more than 11,500 journals pledged to uphold the standards established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (to include nearly 2,500 social science and management related journals [including *PMJ*]), the conceptions about what constitutes self-plagiarism are grounded in natural and physical sciences" (Callahan, 2018, p. 307).

[1] For more information on the topic, I suggest the discussion in *Research Policy* about the Peter Nijkamp "effect" (Horbach & Halffman, 2019a, 2019b; Lukkezen, 2019).

The tendency for an isomorphic policy toward manuscript recycling should be critically examined, as the extent, form, and relevance of manuscript recycling vary across disciplines. First, as indicated in Horbach and Halffman's (2019b) analysis of 922 papers, the extent of manuscript recycling varies significantly among the academic fields of economics, history, biochemistry, and psychology, with self-plagiarism being most often observed in economics. We lack evidence on the extent of manuscript recycling in project studies, but a comparison of our publication frequency with that of economists, for example, would suggest that self-plagiarism is less common in project studies. Secondly, the forms of recycling also vary. For example, we rarely observe a case of article duplication in project studies; that is, when identical or near to identical manuscripts are submitted to different journals at the same time without alerting editors, leading to potential publication of near to identical articles. However, this practice is common in fields such as medicine, where approximately 10% of articles are estimated to be duplicates (Roig, 2015). Finally, in its guide, the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) considers the reuse of data—be it in full or disaggregated, aggregated, or segmented—a serious case of manuscript recycling and an act of academic misconduct because it can lead to a skewed view of the phenomenon under study. For example, a common practice in academic fields such as the medical sciences is the meta-analysis of the literature, which compiles results of prior studies—often experiments or trials—and treats each article as an independent sample. However, if the same data are reused without acknowledgment, it will skew the results of the meta-analysis toward the result of that study (Roig, 2015). However, this practice is only applicable to some onto-epistemological stances, which are particularly common in the sciences and not applicable to most research questions in project studies. Thus, a contextual judgment on the reuse of data (words and ideas) is more appropriate.

Despite contrasting views on the severity of manuscript recycling "from deeming 'self-plagiarism' 'a serious offence' and 'academic misconduct' (Bretag & Mahmud, 2009; Martin, 2013) to stating that 'it does not exist' (Callahan, 2014) and deeming it 'unavoidable' (Chrousos et al., 2012)" (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b, p. 493), institutionalized guides condemn the practice categorically. There is even an unfair tendency to demoralize authors for *self-plagiarism* retrospectively (Callahan, 2018). Discussions on the potential advantages of the reuse of short text fragments have become near taboo. Yet, as we will discuss, under certain circumstances, moderate manuscript recycling is acceptable and even beneficial, if the authors own and acknowledge the reused work, and where the new manuscript is of high quality and warrants an original contribution.

Thus, the demonization and institutionalization of manuscript recycling need to be critically revised. Although we respect COPE and ORI, and *PMJ* upholds their standards in principle, we propose to contextualize judgment of manuscript recycling to project studies, based on the principles of ownership, honesty, originality, and academic citizenship. These principles are adapted from those we use to judge plagiarism (Geraldi, In Press). Our judgment principles firmly emphasize the quality and originality of the manuscript over artificial measurements of plagiarism based on percentage similarities. We therefore adhere to relevant international institutional practices, but also deliberately diverge from them when required to maintain our judgment as fair, contextually aware, and focused on the quality of research.

Principle of Ownership: The Legal Side of Manuscript Recycling

The principle of ownership is concerned with the legal side of manuscript recycling. Copyright laws protect the owner in the event of an unauthorized reuse of their artistic or intellectual work (Roig, 2015). Yet, authors may no longer be the owner of their articles as they often transfer the manuscript's copyright to the journal owner as a condition of publication. Where the copyright has been transferred, "manuscript recycling" without the publisher's permission is potentially a violation of the publisher's copyright. Most publishers allow "fair reuse" of manuscripts. Yet, the purposes and extent of fair reuse vary according to the copyright agreement.

Legally, the Project Management Institute (PMI) owns *PMJ,* whereas SAGE manages the publication, licensing, and sales of the journal. In the final stages of the publication process at *PMJ*, authors sign a copyright agreement that transfers all rights in their manuscript to PMI. PMI, in turn, grants SAGE exclusive rights to manage permissions and other sales and licensing of the journal. More specifically, the author agrees to transfer the copyright in their manuscript to PMI, including:

> [T]he exclusive right to reproduce, publish, republish, prepare all foreign language translations and other derivative works, distribute, sell, license, transfer, transmit, and publicly display copies of, and otherwise use the Article, in whole or in part, alone or in compilations, in all formats and media and by any method, device, or process, and through any channels, now known or later conceived or developed; and the exclusive right to license or otherwise authorize others to do all of the foregoing, and granted here. To the extent that any right now or in the future existing under copyright is not

> specifically granted to the Proprietor by the terms of this Agreement, such right shall be deemed to have been granted hereunder. (SAGE, 2017, p. 1)

We could argue whether this is fair and whether we should support Open Science and Open Access. However, if we set that argument aside and only focus on the legal side of manuscript recycling, then, if an author wishes to reuse their *PMJ* publication in cases that go beyond SAGE's author reuse policy, they need to ask permission through the process described on SAGE's website (SAGE, 2020). However, as *PMJ* is published in the United States, U.S. copyright law applies. According to this law, there are four criteria to examine fair use of publication, which may include considering the non-profit purpose or criticism of the later work. Each proposed "fair use" of another party's copyrighted work would require review within its specific context; this also extends to a work owned by another party. A common support for fair use in journal articles is for commentary/criticism or potentially to illustrate the concepts being discussed in the article. However, these terms are subject to interpretation. For example, I asked SAGE lawyers whether a publication would count as "commercial purpose" as it is used commercially by the publishers even if the researcher has no commercial benefit from it. The answer was:

> "Commercial" is a difficult term in that it does not have a universally accepted definition, and so is subject to disagreeing views on what constitutes commercial use. We would recommend caution in evaluating a potential use in an academic journal as commercial, checking with the rights owner if there's any doubt. Commercial uses are still eligible for fair use, depending on the overall four-factor criteria, and we would recommend that fair use consider the overall use, with the commercial use of the later work as just one factor in the overall analysis. (Email exchange with SAGE and PMI legal teams)

More information can be found in the Copyright Law of the United States (U.S. Copyright Office, 1976). However, copyright law does not specify a cap in the percentage for fair reuse of materials and is therefore opaque in relation to the extent of reuse. As far as we understand (note we are not lawyers), the law treats reuse of one's own text, where rights have been granted to another party, and the work of others in a similar way.

As this discussion highlights, the rules appear to be unclear and are decided on a case-by-case basis. Such ambiguity might be providential in some cases, as it allows judgment. However, it is also frustrating, because we don't have clear rules to adhere to and don't really know what is "okay" and what is "not okay." For example, would it not be beneficial, if we could establish that 10% of our manuscript could come from our prior manuscripts in areas such as methodology and case description. In such a situation, we would know where we stand, what we can use, and what is not possible. Unfortunately, such simple rules are not yet in place, and the subject is full of ambiguities.

As authors in project studies are usually not lawyers, we recommend caution and checks if the author is considering the re-use of published material. After all, in the Transfer of Copyright agreement, authors take responsibility for clearing the copyright of any reuse of their own work or that of others. Specifically, the authors confirm that:

> The contribution does not infringe the copyright or violate any proprietary rights, rights of privacy or publicity, or any other rights of any third party, and does not contain any material that is libelous or otherwise contrary to law. (SAGE, 2017, p. 1)

And that,

> [The] contribution is the original work of Contributors (except for copyrighted material owned by others for which written permission has been obtained), has not been previously published in any form (except for any previous public distribution of the Contribution, which has been disclosed in writing to the Editor), and has been submitted only to the Journal. (SAGE, 2017, p. 1)

Thus, in signing the agreement the authors confirm that any recycled material in their manuscript has been disclosed to the editors, so that the editors can make a decision as to whether any further documentation is needed. If the reuse is not disclosed the author infringes on the agreement.

Another relevant legal consideration is the translation of one's work into different languages, for example, writing an article in French for a French journal and then translating it into English for an international journal publication. This used to be a common practice, but today, the translation of a manuscript, even with slight modifications in format and style, can be a violation of the publishing agreement, if done without the publisher's permission and unethical if not acknowledged as a translation. However, it can be ethically acceptable if the translation does not constitute a copyright infringement; in other words, it is not merely a derivative work of the original, the new manuscript is adapted and partly rewritten for a *different audience* (e.g., an English article developed into a French practitioner magazine), and the original article is acknowledged. We, the editorial board of

PMJ, are unlikely to accept translations as we encourage original submissions only. We believe, however, that scholars should not be punished retrospectively for new conventions.

Another potential infringement and definitely an unethical case is the reuse of coauthored manuscripts or data from a joint project in new manuscripts with neither their coauthorship nor consent, because the coauthors co-own the text, ideas, and data. Likewise, funding bodies and universities may own research data and need to consent to new publications in cases, such as where the scholar moved universities or the research project is formally completed (Roig, 2015). The editorial board of *PMJ* expects authors to reuse co-owned material only with the prior written consent of the co-owners of the work and to include an acknowledgment to them.

However, according to ORI regulation, it is legal (and ethical) to reuse unpublished manuscripts, such as conference contributions (that do not have proceedings), unpublished PhD theses (that are not copyrighted or available with a DOI, digital object identifier), funding applications[2], and so forth. (Roig, 2015). In our field, conferences and workshops aim to help authors develop their contributions into a journal article. For that reason, few of our conferences publish proceedings so that contributions can be reused freely. Sometimes, the best conference articles are even invited for special issues. We suggest that the authors acknowledge prior conference contributions (as discussed in 'Principle of Honesty').

Reuse of PhD theses is also a matter of concern. Some PhD theses are submitted as monographs that can be subsequently adapted into manuscripts for journal publications. Other PhD theses are collections of papers. In such cases, the PhD student may often have already published some but not all of the papers in the collection. Universities often place PhD theses online after the PhD has been awarded. When manuscripts from PhD theses are then submitted to journals, plagiarism detection services flag the submissions as plagiarism, and editors may reject the work. There is no commonly agreed-on conduct in such cases, and ORI and COPE advise journals and publishers to communicate their views on the issue to potential authors (COPE, 2015).

At *PMJ*, we consider a desk rejection based solely on a manuscript's similarity with the author's PhD thesis as an unsatisfactory outcome. First, the main criterion for rejection should be the quality

[2] ORI advises a careful engagement with regulations on manuscript recycling in the funding body's guidelines as it is often not permitted to submit the same or similar proposals to different funding bodies at the same point in time.

of the manuscript. Transforming a 300-page monograph into a 10,000-word manuscript for journal publication requires fundamental rewriting of the work in order to meet our quality criteria. Desk rejection should not occur if the author copies a few fragments of text, while at the same time producing a high-quality and coherent text. Some scholars argue that PhD theses constitute a publication because they have gone through an evaluation committee and have been formally accepted. However, this logic would also imply that every peer-reviewed conference contribution should also be considered a publication, as it has also gone through peer scrutiny, which is not the case. Hence, prior peer assessment should not constitute an impediment to the reuse of PhD theses. Furthermore, from the legal perspective, PhD theses that are available at university or country repositories (such as the United Kingdom Council of Research Repositories [UKCoRR]) are usually owned by the author (Imperial College London, 2020); in such cases, reuse is legal and we cannot see a reason for such reuse not to be ethical.

However, some universities copyright PhD theses and give them a digital object identifier (DOI). In such cases, reuse of text, ideas, and representations from these theses may potentially constitute infringement. Early career academics should check their universities' and countries' regulations before making their work available online and before reusing their theses. We also expect to be informed about the reuse of a thesis as well as its copyright status. Therefore, at *PMJ,* we accept the reuse of a PhD thesis if the author owns its copyright, it adheres to the other principles, and is of high quality. We will only ask the thesis to be taken offline during the review period, to ensure double-blind review process. We expect the reuse to be acknowledged in the cover letter at the time of submission and, if accepted, in the manuscript upon publication.

In summary, at *PMJ*, we expect authors to check the copyright agreements of prior work carefully before reusing its text, data, representations, or ideas. Provided the manuscript holds to the other principles, we accept reuse of one's own and owned unpublished work and legally acceptable portions of published manuscripts.

However, we insist that legal concerns are one of the four judgment principles. Robison (2014) notes that "based upon notions of copyright and fair use, commentators describe anything between 10% and 30% as the acceptable limit of unacknowledged textual reuse (Bird and Sivilotti, 2008; Bretag and Carapiet, 2007; Samuelson, 1994)" (Robinson, 2014, p. 267). However, a judgement based solely on percentage is inappropriate, as "what constitutes acceptable textual recycling depends upon the context. Consider the writer who observes the letter but not the spirit of the 30%

rule by consciously pasting whole paragraphs from a previous work and then tweaking word order within key sentences. Compare this case with an author who lifts precisely 10% of the current text from a previous work in a single chunk with no alteration. Which writer is more deserving of the self-plagiarist label? It would be impossible to answer this question without reading both articles and comparing them against the plundered texts" (Robinson, 2014, p. 267). Following this line of thought, at *PMJ* we consider the assessment of plagiarism as a professional judgment based on legal, honesty, originality, and academic citizenship principles, as we will describe in the following sections.

Principle of Originality: The Worthiness of a Manuscript

A main ethical concern is whether manuscript recycling compromises a manuscript's originality. At *PMJ,* we expect authors to inform the editors about their prior related publications in the cover letter. We will judge the submitted manuscript's originality and alert authors about unaccepted overlaps. Our contours of acceptable reuse of text, ideas, and data are detailed as follows. In addition, we maintain high expectations of the originality of the work as with those of any submissions, as discussed in Müller and Klein (2018).

Text Recycling

According to ORI (Roig, 2015), the reuse of portions of texts (i.e., several paragraphs in different parts of the text) should be dismissed as unethical behavior. We question this categorical condemnation. Original manuscripts require unique arguments and, therefore, unique texts. However, paragraphs in the literature review and some parts of the method section would naturally be very similar if not identical within a research program (Callahan, 2018), and there is a limited number of ways to express the same idea or methodological process concisely, clearly, and precisely. For example, a researcher publishes a case study using a particular data collection method, and then develops a text that explains this method clearly and concisely. The researcher reapplies the method to a different project case, leading to different results and new theoretical contributions. The reuse of text fragments in the prior publication's method section is tempting. In such cases, as long as researchers attend to the other principles, why should they paraphrase themselves to say the same thing?

Moreover, why would researchers not be able to exploit their own resources and develop economies of repetition (Davies & Brady, 2000)? After all, research is organized as projects. Like project-based firms, such reuse could help a researcher develop fair competitive advantages if following the suggested principles. First, we improve the quality of our arguments as we dedicate more time to improving text clarity, conciseness, rigor, and elegance and thereby its argument, not because we need to artificially paraphrase it. Therefore, a near to inevitable similarity in some sentences, paragraphs, definitions, and choice of words indicates consistency, focus, and dedication to an area of study, not necessarily laziness. Secondly, as argued in *The Lancet*, a world-leading medical journal, reuse of portions of one's own text is not categorically illegal, as most Copyright Laws would accept fair-use. Hence, some scholars argue for a rule of thumb, which allows 10%–30% of the manuscript to come from one's own previously published material. Such practice will increase research efficiency and speed in publishing relevant results, fostering development of the field (Chalmers, 2009; Chalmers & Glasziou, 2009). Moreover, would it not be equally unethical to spend time, often financed by taxpayers, to paraphrase one's own text to convey exactly the same message? Finally, would it not be more unethical to paraphrase the same idea without proper acknowledgment than simply using the same words and citing them appropriately?

Thus, we do not condemn moderate text recycling categorically and agree with Horbach and Halffman's (2019b) suggestions that:

> Text recycling is permissible "when it concerns brief passages of introductory, theoretical or methodological explanation" (Knaw, 2014). However, reuse of parts of the results, conclusion or discussion sections are, in general, not permissible (Harriman and Patel, 2014). Both policy statements stress the fact that reused passages should never create the suggestion of constituting novel contributions and should always be accompanied by proper references. Other codes of conduct stress the need to be open about recycling material, among others on an author's C.V. or list of publications (ESF/ALLEA, 2011). (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b, p. 495)

Having said that, text recycling should not compromise a manuscript's coherence and respect its unique needs. For example, the method section exemplified earlier could require other justifications to fit the new theoretical background and case. We would also consider it unethical and unfair to copy the entire introduction, the literature review, and the methodology of an article, even if within one research program. *PMJ* values quality over quantity and advises authors and fellow project scholars to reuse text and ideas within reason to enhance profile and quality, not to compromise it. After all, competitive advantages emerge in balancing exploitation and exploration (March, 1991);

hence, our lenient view toward text recycling should not be confused with mere reuse without original thought.

Thus, at *PMJ,* we accept moderate text recycling only if the four principles are not compromised. While each case is examined in context, in this journal, moderate text recycling is, as a rule of thumb, the reuse of not more than one paragraph of an author's previously published methodology, introduction, and literature review, provided this reuse does not compromise the quality of the manuscript. The other sections are expected to be original.

Data Recycling

The ORI considers the reuse of data to be unethical, be it in the form of publishing on the same data set or the aggregation and disaggregation of data (Roig, 2015). The argument is that data recycling can lead to skewed understanding of an empirical phenomenon. For example, "Tramer et al. (1997) point out that duplicate reporting of the effectiveness of a certain drug will yield erroneous results in meta-analyses on these drugs. Estimates of treatment efficacy might be biased, which creates obvious potential harm to patients" (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b, p. 493). However, as Robinson (2014) argues, "the potential negative consequences of [manuscript] recycling are less obvious in the humanities and social sciences" (Robinson, 2014, p. 265), such as project studies. For example, rich qualitative data such as longitudinal ethnography can be correctly interpreted from different theoretical angles and present genuinely different results. Other examples are large experiments. For example, each experiment at CERN's large Hadron Collider produces data that will feed a generation of researchers (CERN, 2020). Data collection is costly to researchers and society and, hence, extracting potential theoretical contributions from a data set is not only accepted but ethical, as Chalmers and Glasziou discuss in *The Lancet* (2009).

Having said that, the reuse of data can be questionable if it is based on slicing the data into too small portions, which may secure a low-level publication, but would fail to extract more fundamental insights that are only possible if the author evokes insights from larger portions of the dataset. Slicing the data may compromise the originality of the work, as the different publications might still be too similar to one another.

Therefore, *PMJ* accepts data recycling if the four principles are met; that is, the reuse is legal, properly acknowledged, and constitutes a unique and worthwhile contribution. Moreover, data reanalysis should not entail other types of academic misconduct, such as force-fitting data into different theories.

Idea Recycling

Manuscripts conveying the same core contribution to the same audience are not acceptable, even if their text is new. However, it is acceptable to publish similar results for different audiences (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b, p. 493). An idea navigates between publication outlets. A successful trajectory typically starts in informal conversations and moves to a draft presented at a conference, which is subsequently crafted into a journal article. Following academic scrutiny, the idea reaches practitioner magazines, public speeches, lecturers, and book chapters. Research grants provide possibilities to expand the idea, the formation of research centers, and a line of research, which may lead to a book along with other related ideas with the potential to become a classic. Thus, repeating the idea and its core messages to different audiences strengthens the idea, increases its impact, and moves it beyond academic ivory towers. Moreover, consistent focus on similar research ideas marks a clear research profile and demarcates one's expertise and academic leadership in a defined field.

As *PMJ* is a research-driven journal that warrants the first, original publication of ideas, we discourage the reuse of ideas in our journal. Nevertheless, we encourage the subsequent translation of a manuscript into different languages and audiences, provided these new publications comply with copyright laws.

Principle of Honesty: Appropriate Acknowledgment of Manuscript Recycling

Manuscript recycling can violate a manuscript's honesty. Ethical writing is based on an implicit contract between the author and the readers, where the authors promise that the manuscript is their production, is truthful, represents the best of their ability, and that ideas and texts from others will be attributed appropriately (Roig, 2015). When an author deceives readers about the originality of the manuscript by not appropriately acknowledging the reuse of prior publications, manuscript recycling can violate this implicit contract.

Although the principle is widely accepted, the actual practice of acknowledging prior work is controversial. One option is to direct the reader to the prior publication without reiterating the argument in the manuscript. This practice circumvents any manuscript recycling issues. However, this only works if the reader is able to understand the current manuscript without reading the prior one, which is not the case in most attempts to recycle work, such as the reuse of text fragments from a method section. Another possibility is to publish more than one article in the same issue. However, given the competition for a publication spot, such development is rather unlikely. Moreover, as the theories and theoretical contributions are different, the manuscripts would probably be better suited to different journals. Finally, the typical time lapse between the development of each of the manuscripts would hamper their simultaneous publication. Another option is to include long, quoted citations to one's work, which is awkward (Callahan, 2018), could compromise the blind review process, and is neither common nor accepted practice in our field. Researchers also struggle "to balance the twin evils of self-plagiarism and self-citation" (Callahan, 2018, p. 315). If they work at the forefront of a topic and publish frequently, they have to refer back to their latest results, as this is the state of knowledge. If they do this by reusing text and referencing themselves, then they are accused of over self-referencing, which is considered unethical as it artificially inflates the prior article's impact rate. If they paraphrase their prior ideas or reuse text and do not reference themselves, they are then accused of self-plagiarism. Whatever they do is wrong. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, Williamson had to refer to his prior work on transaction costs economics, as no one else was working at that advanced level. Indeed, scholars who publish big ideas continue developing them diligently throughout their careers (Davenport & Prusak, 2003). Such development is important and should be valued, not condemned. Thus, dilemmas abound in our attempts to acknowledge our own work.

At *PMJ*, we expect authors to inform editors about the reuse of text, ideas, or data in the cover letter. To avoid a compromise in the double blind peer-review process, manuscript recycling should be referenced in the text using a placeholder, such as the term "the authors," not included in the reference list during the review process. Following the principle of honesty, self-citation is preferred over manuscript recycling without acknowledgment. If accepted, the manuscript's acknowledgment should detail its history: prior conference submissions, PhD theses, publications based on the same data, and other strongly related works. Expressions of gratitude to reviewers, committee members, and conference participants in the acknowledgments section are not mandatory, although recommended.

Principle of Academic Citizenship: Individual and Systemic Disadvantages of Overpublishing

Finally, we examine manuscript recycling in light of project studies as an academic community. First, although we would like to believe that we value publication quality over quantity, as an international community distributed between technical and management schools, our local academic contexts and their related practices of productivity assessment vary. In several fields and perhaps some of our local contexts, high publication pressure is a trigger for excessive and unethical manuscript recycling. The rationale for this is that the number of publications is a measurement of academic performance. Recycling articles increases the number of publications, as less work is required to recycle than to work on new data, new ideas, and new text. Therefore, excessive manuscript recycling provides a false sense of productivity when comparing performance with peers who do not recycle. The difference leads to unfair competition for academic positions, grants, and promotions (Horbach & Halffman, 2019b; Martin, 2013; Roig, 2015).

However, in some contexts, quality rather than quantity indicates the level of academic performance. The institutionalization of journal rankings, such as the *Academic Journal Guide of the Chartered Association of Business Schools,* facilitates the judgment of quality. Moreover, the focus on the impact factors of journals and articles contributes to the shift of academic performance assessments away from publication numbers. Although such performance measurements carry myriad disadvantages, they reduce incentives for excessive manuscript recycling.

At *PMJ*, we value quality over quantity and strongly recommend that project scholars publish fewer but better articles, and we will reject low-quality manuscripts (Müller & Klein, 2018). Indirectly, we hope to curb excessive and unproductive manuscript recycling, such as slicing data too thinly into different publications and thereby sacrificing potentially fundamental insights.

Secondly, overpublishing through excessive manuscript recycling is also unethical because it carries systemic costs to the scholarly community. First, it is common to submit similar if not identical manuscripts to multiple conferences in search of feedback for the further development of the manuscript for journal publication. Although legal (if the conferences do not have published proceedings), this practice overloads the conference review process. Moreover, as the number of conference contributions is limited, the duplicated manuscript could have occupied the spot of an original manuscript and, hence, it carries an opportunity cost. Thus, the decision to submit similar papers to multiple conferences should be weighed carefully. As a rule of thumb, we suggest multiple conference submissions if the paper addresses different scholarly communities. For example, a manuscript on temporality in projects would benefit from feedback from the International Research Network on Organizing by Projects (IRNOP) and the standing group on "Organization and Time" at the European Group of Organization Studies (EGOS). Such practice still carries opportunity and systemic costs, but the costs are justifiable due to the interdisciplinarity of the research. Moreover, the principle of honesty here is equally valid: conference audiences, funding bodies, hiring committees, and promotion committees should be made aware that the publications are similar if not identical.

Furthermore, overpublishing enabled through manuscript recycling can lead to a larger number of lower quality journal submissions, which carries high systemic costs to the scholarly community. First, reviews are costly: peer review is based on volunteer work and limited incentives. Some initiatives, such as offering reviewers a position on the editorial review board of the journal, might help but are not enough. Other initiatives include Publons®, which acknowledge reviewers after the manuscript has been accepted for publication. Despite these initiatives, incentives for reviewing are weak. Thus, submitting a manuscript for a journal *costs* three reviewers working voluntarily to help the author(s). Therefore, when considering a journal submission, it is worth revisiting one's own peer review records. In informal conversation, Professor Renata Meyer, one of the chief editors of *Organization Studies*, suggests the following principle: review *at least* three times as many manuscripts as you have submitted for publication. For example, four journal submissions in a year are offset by twelve manuscript reviews. Professors in established positions are also encouraged to volunteer with more reviews and so create a surplus to help younger and less experienced colleagues.

The work involved in editorial practices is also extensive and equally voluntary. It is customary that editors read every submission before deciding on desk rejecting or sending the manuscript out for review. Moreover, finding appropriate reviewers is not easy and, as an editor, it may sometimes feel like asking colleagues for a favor. Sometimes, we invite over ten reviewers to assemble a competent team of two to three reviewers to work on a manuscript. Reviews are often late and require some personal reminder messages. When submitted, editors need to read the reviews, re-read the manuscript, and compose a letter to the author. If the manuscript develops well, this process is repeated between two and four times before it is accepted for publication.

Hence, overpublishing through excessive manuscript recycling is also unethical in light of the work involved in the publication of a journal article. In summary, the principle of academic citizenship reminds authors of the hidden costs of overpublishing—to the community and their personal career—and calls for personal reflection on the worthiness of a publication.

Concluding Notes

This editorial has described and justified *PMJ*'s stance on self-plagiarism (or manuscript recycling). We iterate our commitment to high-quality research and publication and argue that the practice of moderate manuscript recycling is acceptable if it does not infringe on the four suggested principles of academic work. The principle of ownership alerts us to the potential illegal facet of manuscript recycling of published work, particularly if not owned by the authors. However, we note that fair reuse of published material and reuse of unpublished material is legal. The question becomes whether it is ethical. We consider it ethical in the following cases: where the manuscript's quality and originality are not compromised; where the author is honest and appropriately and generously acknowledges the reuse of work; and where the practice maintains the focus on quality over quantity, and hence does not lead to unnecessary systematic costs to our academic community.

We hope this editorial helps project scholars enhance the quality of our research and contributes to curbing excessive and unethical manuscript recycling. At the same time, we stand firm and do not accept normative guidance that is not appropriate to our research field, and we question the categorical demonization of potentially valuable academic practices. We hope we have brought to attention practices that have been quietly accepted but not openly debated.

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