

Editorial

The unsung heroes of Information Polity

Dear readers of Information Polity. We hope you are well and keeping safe as the second wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic sweeps the world. We have all made significant sacrifices and adjustments to our professional and personal lives over the last year, and hopefully as 2021 progresses we will be able to get back to some sort of normality.

We would like to dedicate this editorial to the people without whom the journal would not be able to function. They fulfil a vital role in upholding standards, and do so without being paid. They are often asked to contribute their expertise at short notice and do so in a diligent and thorough manner. Of course, we are referring to our reviewers – the unsung heroes of Information Polity. They may remain anonymous to the readers of the journal, and those who publish in it, but we are very aware of their endeavours and the value of their contributions. Our reviewers – you know who you are – fulfil a range of critical functions, which go beyond the anonymous peer review of academic manuscripts. They help assess the suitability of fringe topic areas, review the originality of contributions, ensure academic standards are adhered to, examine the credibility of research findings, help authors improve the formation and communication of their research, as well as providing constructive criticism of the manuscripts they are asked to review. This is especially important for early career scholars. The importance of this process to a leading journal cannot be underestimated, and we ‘take our hats off’ to each and every one of you.

We are regularly asked how many reviews an academic should do and what should be included in a review? These are examples of the proverbial ‘how long is a piece of string’ question. In practice, and we are talking from our own experience, we find that for every article we publish we are probably reviewing about another four or five. Of course, this is not a set figure and will differ from academic to academic, and from discipline to discipline. A convenient rule of the thumb here is that you need to do at least as many reviews and as you need reviews to be done on paper that you submit to journals.

So, what constitutes a good review? In essence, a good review aims to make a contribution to the quality of academic work. From our perspective, there are a number of principles that we encourage our reviewers to follow, and ultimately, we are looking for a clearly articulated decision about a manuscript, which we can act upon and which is clearly explained to the author. Whilst, we expect reviews to comment on the suitability of the manuscript for the journal, its contribution to knowledge, the reliability of the research methodology and findings, as well as the quality of the written English and grammar, we also ask that our reviewers follow a broad set of principles, which ensure professionalism, and which are in practice fair and communicable. Put concisely, the broad principles we encourage, include: (1) to help authors make the most of their research; (2) to show respect for the author and the research approaches undertaken; (3) for reviews to be comprehensive, precise and complete, and written in an easy to understand style; and (4) to pay attention to the main points and also the minor ones, including issues relating to formatting and presentation. We believe that these principles are constructive, without taking away the need for a critical edge, and thus create a platform for academic development which strengthens the eGovernment scholarly community.

Over the years, many of us will have received, and probably will continue to receive, critical reviews of our work which are poorly articulated and hard to interpret, sometimes even contradictory. We hope that by pursuing these principles in Information Polity the review process will continue to be robust and reliable, and in doing so, provide a solid foundation for the ongoing success of the journal. Writing a ‘good’ review can be a time-consuming business, but also a rewarding one, which provides genuine benefits to the quality of academic papers and to the dissemination of academic knowledge.

How does Information Polity help its reviewers to do their work well? Information Polity, like other journals provides a guide to reviewers [<https://informationpolity.com/guidelines-reviewers>] which sets out the areas we would like our reviewers to comment on. These guidelines are based on the principles that we have presented in the previous paragraph. Whilst we provide this guide we are also flexible for reviews to take a variety of forms and to rely on the expertise of our reviewers. We encourage reviewers to bring in their expertise and to communicate with the editorial staff any relevant issues that will aid the quality assessment of academic papers.

This issue presents a set of articles (all peer reviewed of course with thanks to the reviewers!) on an area of growing importance to the information polity – the contemporary use of algorithms and algorithmic transparency in government and public services. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics and processes associated with big data, has meant that information flows and decisions utilising these new flows, have become increasingly opaque and hard to observe and understand, even for scholars of eGovernment. With this in mind, processes and practices associated with the public administration values of oversight, accountability and transparency, become even more pertinent, if these values are to be embedded in these new technological developments. We would like to thank Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen (Utrecht University) and Sarah Giest (Leiden University) for managing this special issue and bringing it to fruition. We suspect that the academic and public discourse around the governance of algorithms and AI is only just beginning. In this respect, this special issue will make an important and lasting contribution to this debate.

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