Knowledge creation in academe: An inside story about publishing, reviewing, and editorial work

Yehuda Baruch

Southampton Business School

Workshop for Tel Chai, 19 October 2022:
How to improve your chances of publishing success

Personal background

- Why do I feel confident to advise on these issues?
- Vast experience in editorial work and reviewing:
  - Associate Editor, HRM (US), FT listed journal, 4* ABS (5 years)
  - Editor of G&OM– a major US journal, ISI of 2.9; 3* ABS (4 years)
  - Editor of CDI (4 years) and Associate Editor of JMP
  - ERB member of 14 refereed journals
  - Initiator and lead co-editor of the books:

- Winning Reviews: A Guide for Evaluating Scholarly Writing.

- Opening the Black Box of Editorship

- Many rejections; some success in publishing (>165 refereed papers, many in 4* or FT list, H-index 79; > 28,000 citations)

Our lives – Publish or Perish

- What are the odds?
- In a dual process, ask yourself – “What’s in it for me?” (for both sides)

Why; what's in it for Me: Author(s) vs. Editor

True, value-based, and declared

- Knowledge creation; scientific progress

True, pragmatic, instrumental

- Reputation (self)
- Line in the CV
- Promotion
- Etc.

True, value-based, and declared

- Knowledge creation; scientific progress

True, pragmatic, instrumental

- Reputation (self; Journal)
- IF (ISI) / ranking
- Rejection rate
- Etc.

Our lives – Publish or Perish

- Within Academe, Editors' role is highly significant
- Reviewers and editors play a crucial role in knowledge generation
- Editors affect researchers' careers in very meaningful ways (both positively and negatively)

But

- There is no good source of information of how this system works, in particular for global scholars
- There is no formal preparation or advice for those who may wish to review or take on an editorial role.

Testimony: Jay B. Barney

'For many, the process of publishing in the best management journals is an enigma wrapped in a mystery. Even when they are successful, they are never sure why. And too often rejections hurt, but don't provide insight about how to increase the likelihood of success…'

(written for Clarke et al. 2019 book)

Goals of this Presentation

- Overall goal: To unveil the “mystery” of journal publication processes of knowledge creation
- More specific goals:
  - ‘Demystify’ the process and explain what happens behind the scenes - the internal operations and decision processes taking place at various journals
  - Help prospect authors to be more successful by understanding how the system works
  - Discuss reviewing as an academic activity
  - Talk about becoming and being an Editor

Learn from others

- How?
- What is common amongst successful writers?

They read!

- Lesson No. 1: Read

Read what?

- Journal papers in journals you wish to publish in.

The seven reasons for rejection

- **Desk reject:**
  - **No fit for the journal (content)**
  - **Poor presentation, not matching the journal style**
  - **Message not big enough for the journal**
- **Desk Edit/return**
  - **Worthy message, poor presentation or missing critical points**
- **Reject after review**
  - **Reviewers not convinced (see point 3)**
  - **Reviewers lottery**
- **Reject after R&R (!)**
  - **Messing up the revision**

Daft 1995's "Why I recommended your manuscript be rejected"

1. No theory
2. Concepts and operationalization not in alignment
3. Insufficient definition--theory
4. Insufficient rationale--design
5. Macro-structure-organization and flow
6. Amateur style and tone

…

Daft 1995's "Why I recommended your manuscript be rejected" cont.

7. Inadequate research design
8. Not relevant to the field
9. Over-engineering
10. Conclusions not in alignment
11. Cutting up the data (slicing too thin)

Hertzberg's Motivation Theory revisited for manuscripts' reviews

- Hertzberg theory is about motivation
- Hertzberg theory distinguishes between
  - Hygiene factors (essential, a lack of them will reduce motivation, but fulfilling them will at best move people to 'neutral' motivation)
  - Motivating factors (those who really make the difference)
- Consider what factors will influence recommendations of reviewers/editors in this light

From research to a paper

	Poor paper	Good paper
Good research	You have messed it up	Great – well done!
Poor research	☹	The Manchester United effect

Learn from history?

- The only thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history (Woody Allan)
- Why should we NOT try to learn from history in the attempt to publish?

  - Ashkanasy, N. M. 2010. Publishing today is more difficult than ever. ***Journal of Organizational Behavior,*** 31(1): 1–3.

Example for rising bar

- International Journal of Management Reviews:

From

- ‘Literature reviews’

To

- ‘Literature reviews’

plus

- “Push knowledge forward”
- “Make conceptual contribution”

Example for rising bar (cont)

- ***JOB*** reports that ‘reviewers consider multi-source (or at least multi-administration) data collection methods to be a pre-requisite for publication’ (Ashkanasy, 2010: 1).
- ***JAP*** warns that ‘cross-sectional, single-source, survey-based studies are not encouraged’ (Kozlowski, 2009: 1).
- Qualitative: Nvivo; more interviewees

Write a paper

- Bear in mind a journal or a type of journal
- Major options:
  - Academic empirical
    - Qualitative
    - Quantitative
    - Mixed
  - Academic conceptual / “review”
  - Practitioner

What makes a strong paper?

- **Contribution** – to theory ***and*** to practice
  - Is it interesting? What's new?
  - Does it add to current 'conversation'?
  - The '***So what?***' question
- **Credibility**
  - Builds on established theory
  - Does the methodology fit and robust?
  - Are the conclusions valid?
  - Limitations – don't try to hide these

Interesting indeed? Life satisfaction

	Poor	Rich
Healthy		‘So what’?
Unhealthy	‘So what’?	

What makes a strong paper? Cont.

- Generalizability? Global or context specific?
- Did you suggest future research agenda?
- **Readability** (1)
  - Are you clear?
  - Is it clear to the reviewer, for example…

Evidence: Real reviewers comments

- “I'm puzzled as to what exactly you are trying to accomplish here.”
- “I had to read several pages into the manuscript to get a hint about what you are trying to achieve.”
- “What exactly is this paper about? After reading it twice, I'm still not sure”

What makes a strong paper? Cont.

- **Readability** (2)
  - Did you follow a logical progression?
  - Simplicity vs. complexity
- Criteria: Do you have it clear in your own mind?

- **Readability - style** (3)
  - Journal style; academic style
  - Is there a repetition?
  - Are you repeating yourself?...

Read

- Huff Sigismund, A. (2009). *Designing Research for Publication,* London, Sage.
- Silvia, P. J. (2007). *How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing*. Washington DC, APA.
- Clark, T. Wright, M. & Ketchen, D. (Eds.) (2019). *How to Get Published in the Best Management Journals*. Edward Elgar.

Authors, co-authors

- Single author vs. multiple
- No simple rule
  - For collaboration, best have complementarities
  - Clear assignment of roles
  - Advanced agreement of order of authorship
- Career advice
  - Have a mix
  - Beware of ‘sleeping co-authors’
  - PhD students – with supervisors

Get the ‘Know How’

- Title
- Abstract & key-words
- Intro
- Body
- Ending
- Referencing
- Figures, tables etc.

Title

- Informative
- Catchy
- Tuned to web search

Examples:

- Enhancing daily well-being at work through lunchtime park walks and relaxation exercises: Recovery experiences as mediators.
- Paradoxical leader behaviors in people management: Antecedents and consequences.
- The art of continuous change: Linking complexity theory and time-paced evolution in relentlessly shifting organizations.
- When can humble top executives retain middle managers? The moderating role of top management team faultlines.

Examples – what not to do (now):

- Agency theory: An assessment and review

Writing abstract

- Abstract should be concise and should reflect only what appears in the original paper.
- “Structured Abstract”:
  - The purpose of the paper – the reason(s) or aims of the research? To which theory it contributes?
  - The design/methodology/approach, to manifest how the objectives are achieved
  - The findings – the analysis, outcomes, intriguing results
  - Theoretical contribution(s)
  - Managerial implications (if relevant)
  - The added value it brings to the literature (what is original, novel)

  + Advice: Avoid references

Introduction

- What is the similarity between a paper evaluation and a job interview?

Introduction

- Why is it important?
- What is known? What is not known
- Thus: What is the gap?
- The contribution(s)
  - How did you bridge that gap
  - no less important: *Why does it matter?!*
- Suggested end: “The aim(s) of this paper…
- It is structured as follows…” - ?

The body of the paper

- Note that this workshop is not about the body of a specific paper
- You are the world number 1 expert in your field (or should be)

- Still, some general observations:

Observations (why will they reject it)

- Quant:
  - Trivial hypotheses + reversed causality
  - Too few or too many hypotheses
  - Not enough data
  - Significant but not meaningful
  - Research design (e.g. not cross-sectional)
  - Analysis do not fit
  - Not testing all hypotheses
  - Results are marginal (or non-significant at all)

Observations (why will they reject it)

- Qual:
  - No literature review
  - Trivial (or no) Research Questions
  - Too few or too many RQ
  - Not enough data (saturation)
  - Research design
  - Analysis tool
  - Unclear why/how the RQ were answered
  - Results are not convincing

Observations (why will they reject it)

- Mixed; The new fad?
- Important – not always justified
- Makes paper long or miss much by being too short on quant and on qual
- Need to ‘sell the story’

Observations

- Conceptual/theoretical:
- Consider following Lange & Pfarrer (2017) 5Cs:
  - Common Ground
  - Complication
  - Concerns
  - Course of action
  - Contribution

- Lange, D., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2017). Editors' Comments: Sense and Structure—The Core Building Blocks of an AMR Article. *Academy of Management Review, 42*(3), 407-416.

Ending (typically called ‘Discussion’)

- What is the contribution?…
  - to theory
  - to practice

- Did you fulfil the aim(s)/answered RQ?
- What are the limitations (and implied future research)
- End on a positive note (‘Conclusions’?)

Referencing +

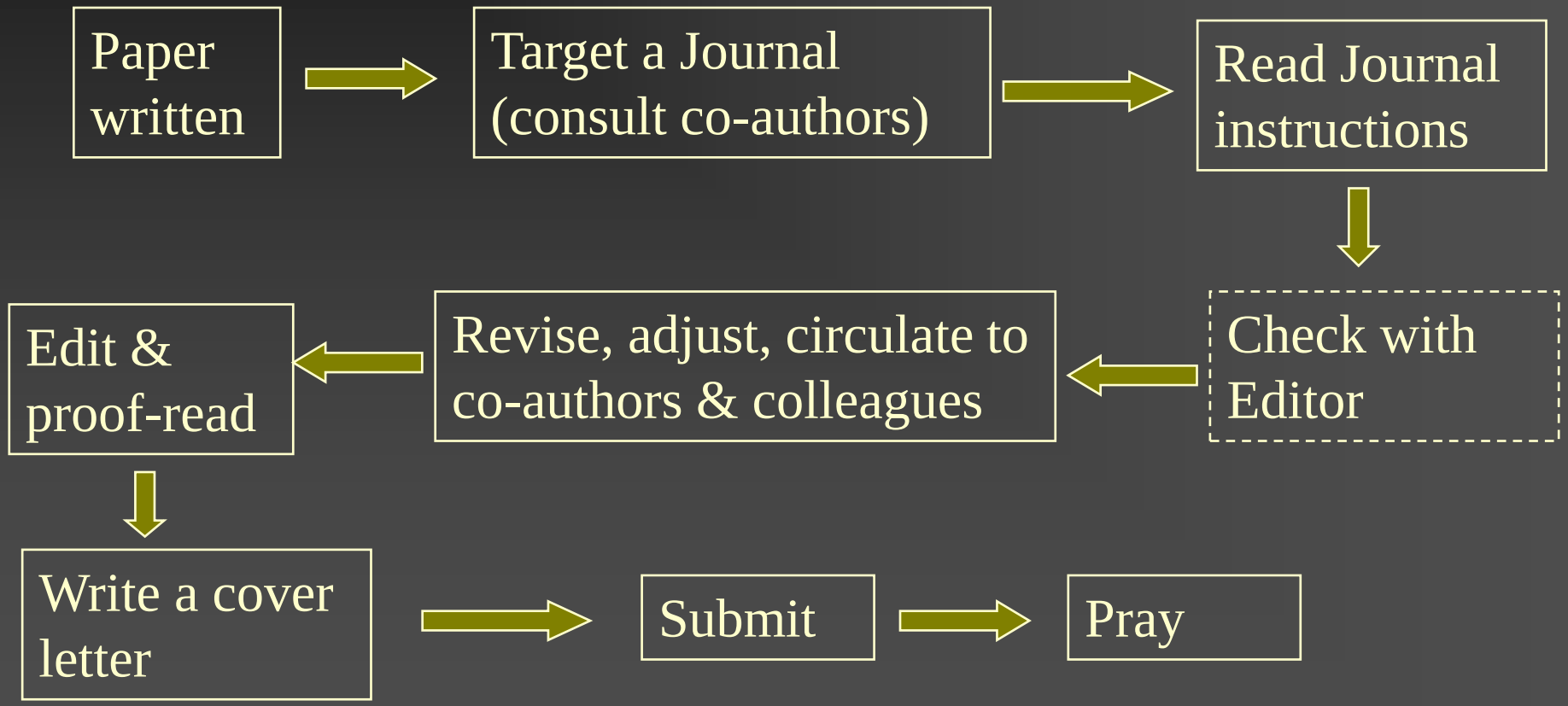
- Always do your homework – match presentation to journal's style – in particular, references
- Same for figures, tables, etc.
- Do the highlighter exercise for a match between the references list and the references mentioned in the text

The process

- Stage one – under ***Your*** control
- Stage two – under the ***Editor's*** control
- Stage three – back to ***you***

- Can be (hopefully) a cyclical process

Stage one – under Your control



Stage one – under Your control

Paper written → Target a Journal (consult co-authors)

Target a journal

- Journal scope, aim, agenda
- How “big” is the contribution? Evolution or revolution (incremental or breakthrough)?
- Check Impact Factor (ISI)
- Also ABS/FNEGE/your institution’s list
- Relevant readership
- Relationship with societies and globalization
- Time from submission to decision
- Time from decision to publication

Journal lists

- All are relevant
- All are politically biased
- Look at more than one, in particular what your School appreciates
  - See: Vogel, R. Hattke, F. & Petersen, J. (2017). Journal rankings in management and business studies: What rules do we play by?. *Research Policy*, 46, 1707-1722.
  - https://charteredabs.org/the-relevance-and-challenges-of-using-journal-guides-to-evaluate-the-quality-of-journals-and-papers/

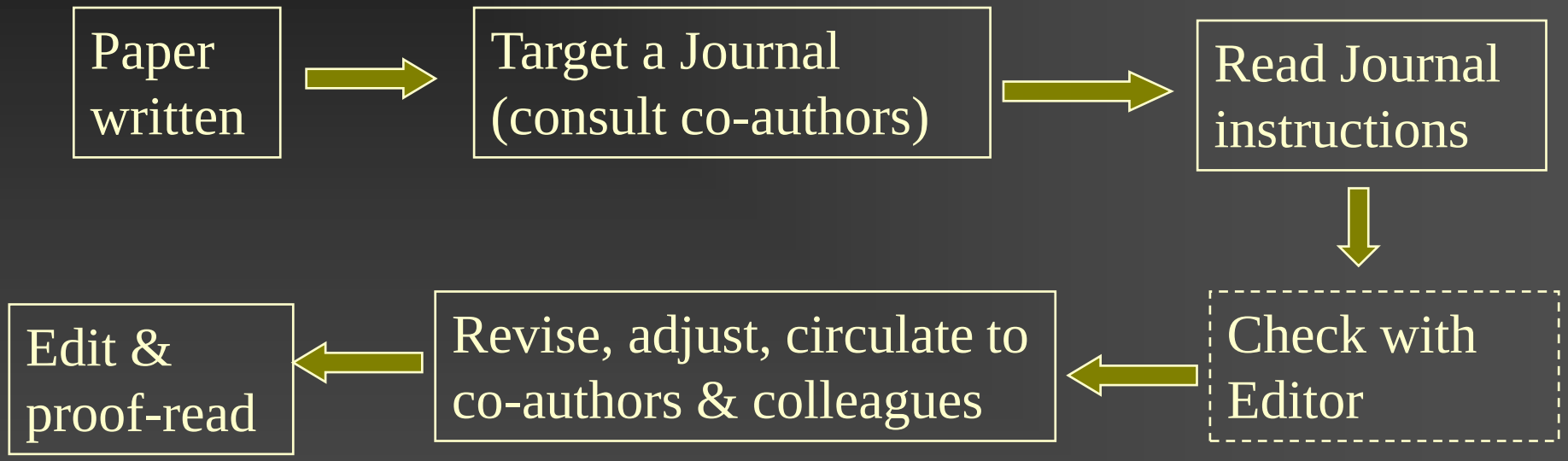
Where to publish – which journal?

- Check
  - Look at topics, style, length, citations
  - See what is published there (empirical? conceptual? all?)
  - Build on recent articles
  - See who published there (top people?)
  - Consult co-authors, mentor, colleagues, research director, Dean
- Evaluate the standard and compare to your paper
- Pitfalls –
  - Shooting too high
  - Shooting too low

Shooting too high?



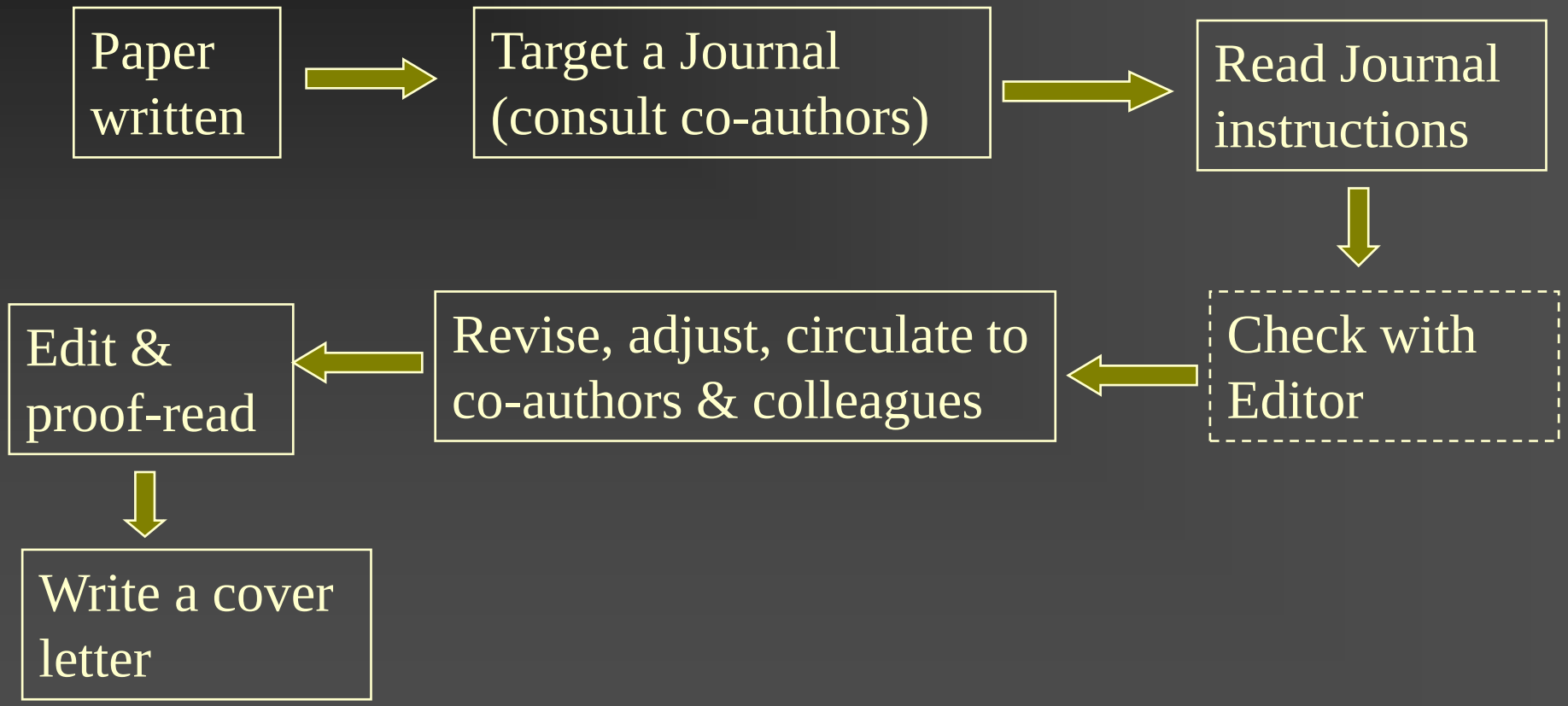
Stage one – under Your control



Before submitting

- Can you find your own mistakes?
  - Categorically – NO
  - Ask colleagues to read, review and provide comments
  - Choose honest people; reciprocate
  - Send it to professional editing and proof-reading
  - Any spellling mistakes?
  - Mistakes grammatical any?

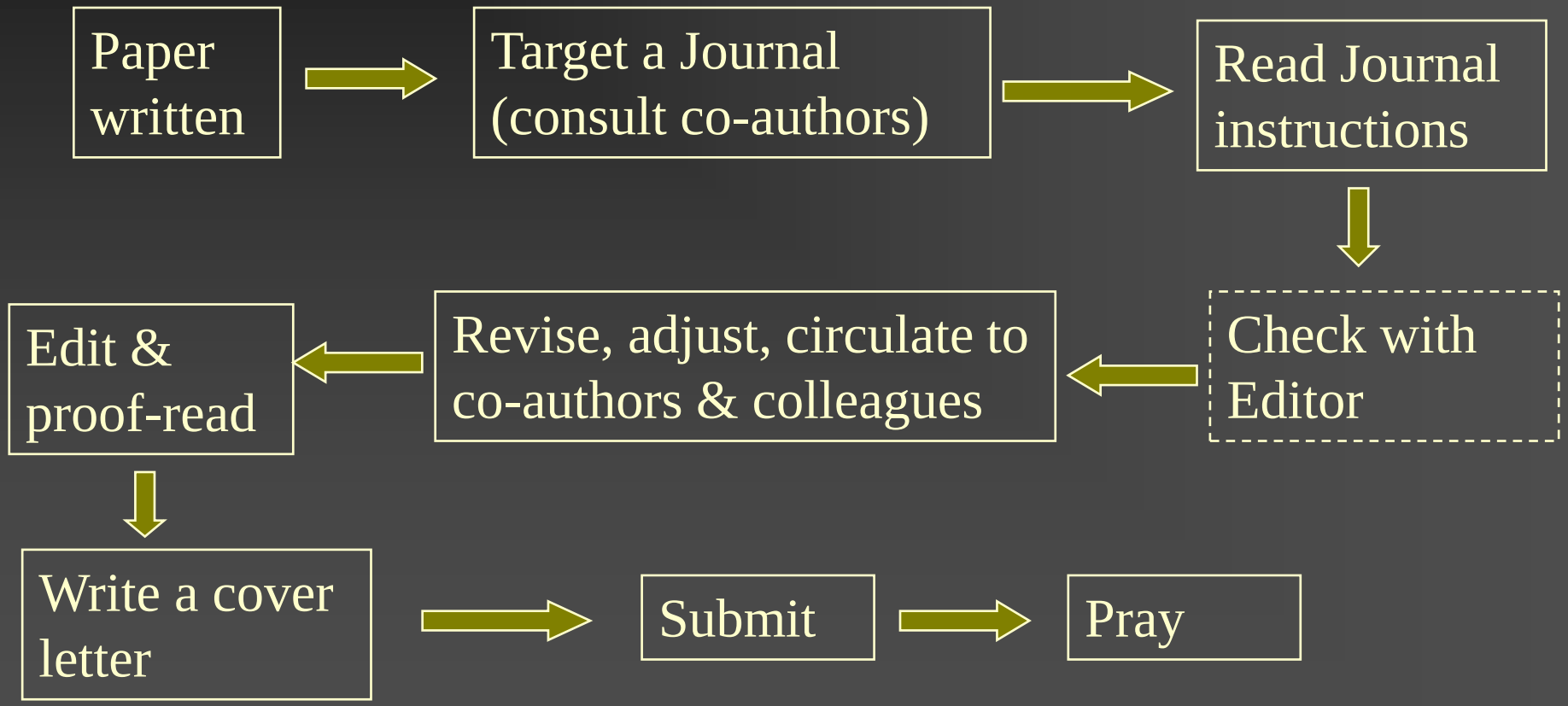
Stage one – under Your control



Cover letter

- Short; concise;
- The Editor might not even read it
- Indicate:
  - Highlights
  - Fit for the Journal
  - Unique issues

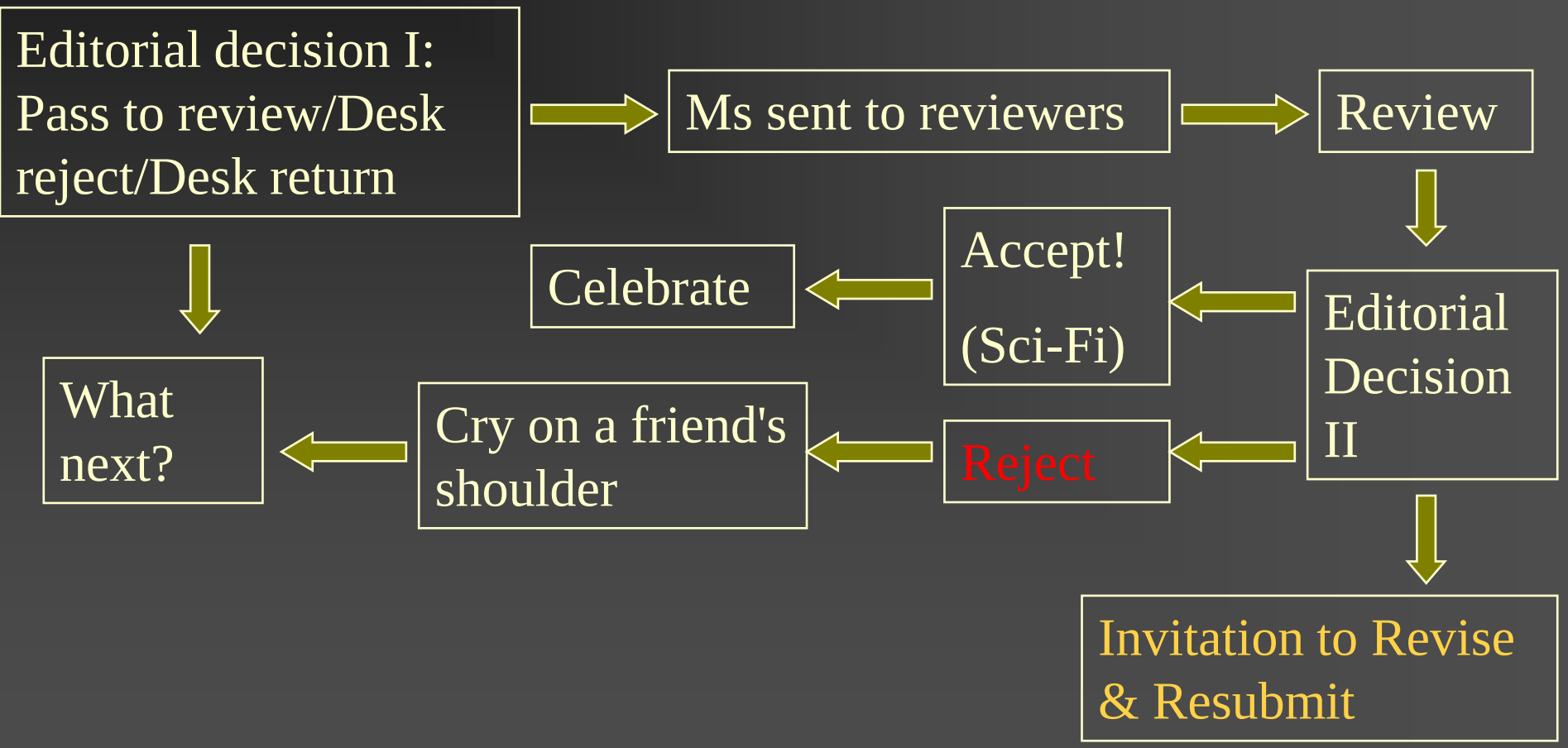
Stage one – under Your control



Not just pray

- Work on your other projects
- I did say projects, not project
- Manage your pipeline

Stage two – under Editor's control



Stage two – under Editor's control

Editorial decision I:

Pass to review

Desk reject

Desk return/Reject and re-submit

Desk rejection – you are not alone

- Was 10%, 30%, or even 60% (!)
- Now much higher: In Human Relations: 72% in 2021/22; some 89% in IJMR
- Reasons:
  - No fit for the journal
  - Paper quality
  - Difficulty in finding reviewers
  - Editors do not wish to bother reviewers with really poor papers

Why was it a desk rejection?

- Does not fit with the journal mission
  - No fit – other (style, referencing)
- Unclear contribution - what are you saying?
- No contribution – the '***So what?***' question
  - "No one did it before" is not good enough!
- Poor data
- Wrong research methods
- So, what did you say? E.g. Implications

The last straw?

- Don’t wait for R&R to re-format the style and references

  [they are not (that) stupid].

- Invest the efforts or use ‘endnote’ or similar software

Stage two – under Editor's control

Editorial decision I:
Pass to review/Desk reject/Desk return

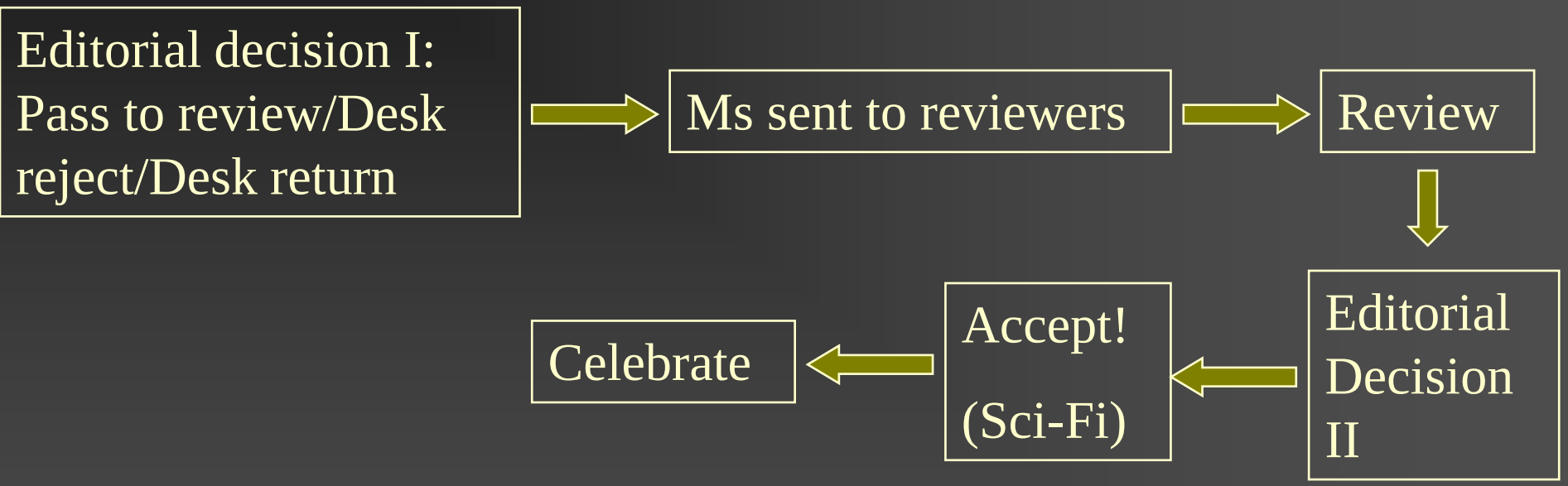


What next?

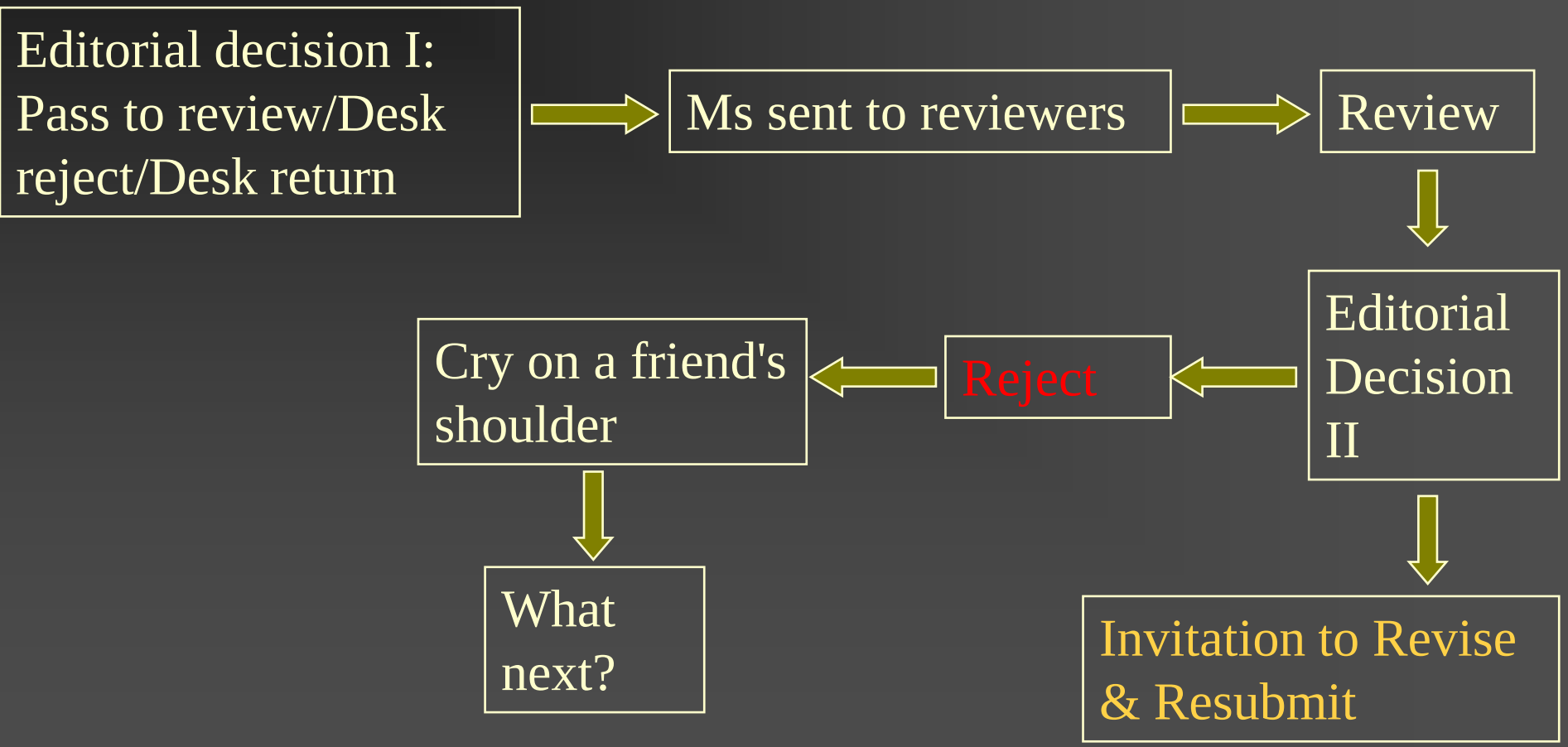


Revise & Resubmit

Stage two – under Editor's control



Stage two – under Editor's control



Why did the reviewers recommend a rejection?

- Have you pointed out to current knowledge?
- Have you pointed out a gap?
- Is it clear how your work bridges this gap?
- Did you convince them too about the '***So what?***' question
- Wrong research method; Poor data
- What is it that you say – discussion & conclusions
- Have you annoyed the reviewers?

Read

- Day, N. E. (2011). The silent majority: Manuscript rejection and its impact on scholars. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 10, 4,* 704-718.

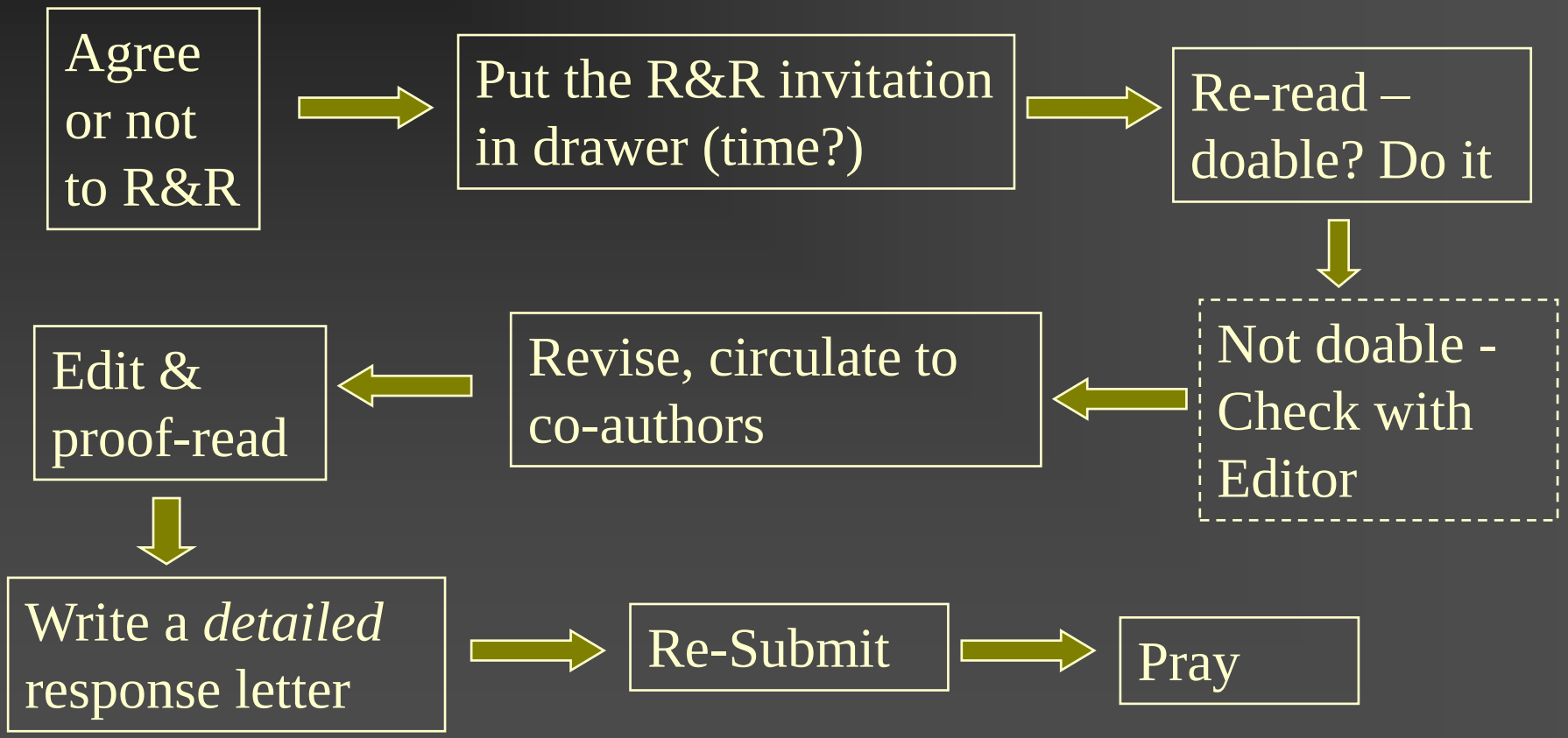
Issues

- Fit for the journal?
- Did you consider what the reviewers have been asked to look for? *
- The Reviewers' lottery?

- Was it really a rejection or a 'hidden R&R'?

* See workshop exercise (G&OM list) + http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/reviewershome.reviewers/reviewersguidelines

Stage three – back to you



Revise & Resubmit

- Great news (practically, the best possible result)
- The R&R result requires you to:
  - Rethink and reframe
  - Gain sharper focus
  - Sometime collect more data
  - Offer a clear ’story’ and contribution
  - In short, make it better
  - And still short
- So, what can you do? What should you do?

Revise & Resubmit

- Just do it!

Revise & resubmit to the journal?

Altman, Y. & Baruch, Y. (2008). Strategies for revising and resubmitting papers to refereed journals. *British Journal of Management*, 19(1), 89-101.

- A study based on responses from 249 business and management scholars from the UK and USA
- The question – what would authors do when invited to revise & resubmit
- A number of options exist

Revise & resubmit to the journal?

- The seven options:
  - (1) discard the paper
  - (2) submit ‘as it is’ to another journal of similar or better standard
  - (3) submit ‘as it is’ to another journal of lower standard
  - (4) revise and submit to another journal of similar or better standard
  - (5) revise and submit to another journal of lower standard
  - **(6) revise and re-submit to the original journal**
  - (7) challenge the editor’s decision.

Why – Reasoning Matrix

	Agency: Self focused argument	Agency: System focused argument
Instrumental argument	I want to publish – this is the most cost-effective way. I work to optimize my research output – a calculative approach	This is how the system works, and I have to comply. These are the 'rules of the games' (the non compliance people try to 'beat the system')
Value-based argument	This process comes to make me better, to improve the paper, and thus develop me too	This is 'fair-play', this is the most ethical approach

Navigating the revision process

- R&R is a great opportunity – three smart people give you advice – for free!
  - Is it really free? Not morally – to be fair, you should return – give back to the community by reviewing for the journal. How many?

Navigating the revision process

- Check – did you understand the reviewers' commentary?
- List the commentary (number them)
- Respond to ***each*** of them carefully
  - If you disagree, explain why; don't be aggressive
- Meet the deadline
  - Or ask the Editor for an extension

Over vs. Under Responsiveness

- Over-response can ‘kill the paper’.
  - Keep the flow
  - Keep your original message
  - Keep enough time for reflection before re-submitting
- Under response can annoy the reviewers
  - This is the last thing you wish to do

The Response Document

- List EACH point
- Explain how you answer it (or why not)
- Indicate where the change is (or copy & paste it).

Revision – further comments

- Exceed expectations?
  - Be careful – do not overdo it (might generate new issues)
- Conduct surgery, not cosmetic changes
- ***Every*** comment should be referred to
  - A change/modification
  - Or a polite explanation why you cannot or will not follow it

What if…

- Contradiction across reviewers demands
- Paper becoming too long
- They want more data
- They missed the idea
- They try to ‘ghost-write’ your paper

Keep your message

- Your academic identity is what do you stand for
  - Do not let reviewers pull you to their agenda
- Radical change can also
  - Make the paper new but worse or wrong
  - Reveal the poor nature of the paper

What they will not tell you

- % of success of R&R in the journal
  - In AMR it was 50%
  - In another journal it was 33% (!)
  - Yet, in others, most R&R are accepted
- Reject can come in any stage
  - Including after ‘Conditional Acceptance’…

Rejection? No such a thing

- Take a ‘Reject’ as “An invitation to revise and re-submit to another journal”
- Is it really a ‘reject’ or maybe ‘R&R’?
- Do not take it as a personal insult - they do not hate you; they just do not agree with your ideas/method/conclusions…
- Consult the Editor to which other journal
- Remember Barney’s RBV (ask his wife)

IF accepted

- Celebrate
- Inform: Co-authors; Dean; friends & family
- Update your CV
- Wait (months) for proof-reading
- Do proof-reading (within couple of days)
- Work with the production; send a copyrights form
- Check ‘on-line before publication’
- Send copies to leading scholars in the area (generate initial fast impact)
- *Volunteer to review for this Journal*

Other issues – nominating reviewers (and Associate Editor)

- Different rules in different journals
  - You may be asked to nominate reviewer(s)
  - They *may or may not be selected*
  - Choose carefully; check with them?
  - Avoid conflicts of interests
- Rule out certain reviewers?
  - Preferably not
  - Sometimes it is important nevertheless

Other issues – Special Issue?

- Risks vs. opportunities

Tips

- Review for journals, in particular your target journals (see the following slides)
- Attend conferences
- Collaborate with co-authors who are:
  - Smarter than you; that will energize you; that have complementary competencies
- Manage your research projects as such

Reviewing

- *Reviewing is indeed a demanding role, in terms of time, energy and the pressures*
- *We are required to perform it well*

But

- *It does have a significant and positive impact on our competence as authors, and influence academic careers.*

Learn from others

- How?
- What is common amongst successful writers?

They review!

- Lesson No. 2: review

Review for whom?

- Journal you wish to publish in.

Lesson numner 3

- What is common amongst successful writers?

They write!

- Lesson No. 3: Write

What to write?

- Journal papers
- Books
- Do not waste your time on…

Career advice: The relevance of the Intelligent Career (Arthur & Defillippi, 1995)

- Know Why
- Know How
- Know Whom

+

- Know When



Thank you

for the opportunity to present to you