Organizational Structures and Relationships in Canadian, Noncommercial Journals: Supporting Scholar-Led Publishing

Jessica Lange and Sarah Severson

Library publishers have an important role in building an equitable and open scholarly publishing ecosystem. As library publishers' services mature, it is critical to understand how noncommercial journals operate and organize their daily activities to ensure the journals' success, longevity, and sustainability. To inform these efforts, the authors interviewed managing editors/editors-in-chief of fifteen Canadian, noncommercial journals on their organizational structures and relationships with external organizations (e.g., associations, libraries, etc.). The authors found that the journals operated collaboratively, often relied on a core team to handle their main activities, and varied in how they harnessed external relationships.

Introduction

Over the past decade, many libraries have launched journal publishing programs. As of 2022, the Library Publishing Coalition lists over 140 libraries in its directory.[1] These programs are part of a movement to build a scholar-led, community-driven publishing infrastructure that provides alternatives to the increasingly commercial landscape of journal publishing. As evidenced by the work of the Next Generation Library Publishing project, values such as openness, equity, accessibility, anti-oppression, and transparency are part of the reflective practice of scholarly communications stakeholders.[2] Library publishing programs have an important role in building a more equitable and open research ecosystem.

As library publishers' services develop, it is critical to understand how noncommercial journals operate and organize their daily activities to ensure their success and sustainability. In their review of independent[3] journals, Björk, Shen, and Laasko write that

> "[m]uch of the publisher-led discussion [around sustainable publishing models] has been focused on the expenses of IT infrastructure, and copyediting, which are visible parts of the work done in publishing. *Less emphasis has been on the tasks involved in coordinating and motivating the network of editors, editorial board members, reviewers, submitting editors etc., which are an essential part of running a journal"* (emphasis added).[4]

*Jessica Lange is Coordinator, Scholarly Communications and Associate Librarian at McGill University Library & Archives, email: jessica.lange@mcgill.ca; Sarah Severson is Digitization Librarian at University of Alberta Library, email: sarah.severson@ualberta.ca.

Björk, Shen, and Laasko note that editorial labor was often what made an independent journal successful.[5] Previous research by the authors[6] determined the extent of this labor and its compensation (or lack thereof). However, the coordination of these efforts remains unstudied.

To better understand the structure and relationships of these journals, the authors undertook a narrative case study. This type of methodology, grounded in the participants' voices, had two goals:

- Describe the organizational structure of noncommercial journals. Organizational structure is defined as "the sum total of the ways in which [the organization] divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them."[7]
- Determine the relationship between journals and their related organizations (e.g., associations, libraries, etc.); this includes identifying forms of support provided to the journals by these organizations.

The authors chose noncommercial journals as a focus of intrinsic interest for two reasons: these journals are often supported by library publishers, and if libraries want to build a robust, open, and accessible publishing landscape, focusing on existing, noncommercial journals is a strategic choice.[8] Previous research identified that these kinds of journals often follow the "diamond open access" model (i.e., charging fees to neither readers or authors).[9] In a time of rising open access costs for authors, noncommercial journals can make publishing more equitable and affordable for researchers.[10] Furthermore, noncommercial journals are an excellent example of "community-owned" scholarship, and understanding how their infrastructure is owned and staffed was identified as part of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) research agenda.[11]

This paper will provide library publishers and those interested in academy-led scholarly publishing with an understanding of how these journals coordinate their work and organize their operations. It will also describe these journals' relationships with organizations such as universities, associations, and libraries. The paper concludes with a discussion of how library publishers can strategically align their services to better meet the needs of the editorial teams on their platforms.

Literature Review

Journal Editorial Labor and Organizational Structure

Research on journal organizational structure is limited. Giménez-Toledo et al.'s article provides the primary existing analysis of editorial board structure in its survey of Spanish humanities and social sciences (HSS) journals.[12] They note that the organizational structures of journals are "highly diverse" and lack uniformity.[13] They concluded that the most common structure was one in which the editorial board manages most of the journal's operations, typically in collaboration with the executive editor (also known as editor-in-chief). They also found that while editorial advisory boards existed for most journals, they played a nominal role in a journal's functioning and could ostensibly be replaced by the existing editorial board.

Since the data was survey-based, their analysis was unable to extend deeper into journals' operations. The survey was also undertaken in a vastly different publishing landscape (in 2009), prior to significant changes and growth in open access. Based on Giménez-Toledo et al.'s survey, the authors conducted their own survey, which examined the tasks, compensation, and labor undertaken by Canadian noncommercial journals in 2020.[14] While the 2020 findings were not specifically related to organizational structure, this research study did support some of Giménez-Toledo et al.'s other findings: for example, that there is limited involvement of production personnel in a journal's overall task range, the tasks undertaken by the editorial team may vary greatly, and editorial advisory boards have nominal involvement in journals' activities.[15]

A deeper look at individual journals was conducted by Björk, Shen, and Laakso, who conducted a qualitative analysis of five "successful" independent journals.[16] Although this analysis had a broader aim than organizational structure, it included comments which touched on these issues, such as when organizational structure influenced the journal's success. For example, one journal editor noted how its "tiered managerial structure" aided the journal in managing its workload. Another participant remarked that they had to restructure the editorial process to "share the burden" over more coeditors following a large increase in submissions.[17] These findings were echoed in Edgar and Willinsky's survey of Open Journal Systems (OJS) journals, where they noted that having more editors "enables the workload [of the journal] to be distributed."[18]

While other studies on editorial composition exist, they review the characteristics of persons holding editorial appointments (e.g., country, gender, institution, etc.) rather than the structure and nature of the positions themselves.[19] Several papers explore individuals' personal experiences with the role and nature of the editorial board.[20] There are also some general guides or "how-tos," which provide information on the general roles and responsibilities of editorial boards.[21] This is not to say these resources are not useful for incoming editors, but they are not formally grounded in research, nor do they specifically address organizational structure.

Relationships with External Organizations

Journals do not typically exist in a vacuum—there is a large body of research, for example, detailing the history of scholarly societies supporting scholarly publishing.[22] This continues to be true to this day—for example, Elina Late et al. found that in Finnish scholarly publishing, learned societies account for the majority of peer-reviewed publication outputs operating in Finland.[23] While scholarly societies/associations are one piece of a journal's network, other organizations contribute as well. Previous research on Canadian noncommercial journals indicated that almost all journals had affiliations with at least one external organization (e.g., library, association, university, etc.), while more than half had at least two affiliations.[24] Research into international journals hosted on OJS support these findings, noting that academic departments and scholarly associations were among the top two sponsoring organizations for journals.[25] These findings are also similar to Björk's investigation into Nordic open access journals.[26] Such support is incredibly valuable; a recent report by Érudit on humanities and social sciences journals in Canada noted that institutional support for journals "is a key factor in the way teams perceive the vitality of their journal."[27]

While such support may be valuable, it is often not clear what that support entails: many of these studies provide examples of the kinds of support journals may receive, although these are usually referenced in passing and not investigated in depth. For example, Björk's article above notes the role of libraries, associations, and universities in hosting centralized portals for publishing software infrastructure (similar to Björk, Shen, and Lasko's and Cavaleri et al.'s).[28] In the Canadian context, the nonprofit hosting platform Érudit and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Evaluation Division (2021) indicate that some scholarly journals receive funds from either universities or scholarly societies/associations, although they did not appear to be in the majority.[29] These findings were echoed in the authors' previous research[30] as well as the international Diamond OA Journals Study.[31] Support may also take the form of "in kind" support, such as "course releases, technical support, server space, administrative support, office space, etc."[32]

These articles and reports, however, do not elucidate the role of other groups in journal operations (such as libraries) or try to quantify the extent and nature of these relationships. Also, several of these articles are large-scale studies, looking at journals from a birds-eye view in an aggregate across hundreds of journals. For this study, the researchers wanted to flip the viewpoint to that of the journal, seeing how the journal's editorial teams comprehend these relationships from the inside-out, drilling into their perception of these relationships rather than simply stating their existence. This was part of what led the authors to choose the narrative case study approach, as this would give voice to the journal's editorial team and their experiences and insights.

Methodology

Positioning of the Researchers

At the time of the study, the authors were librarians working in the area of library publishing. The journals supported by the authors' publishing programs were primarily Canadian, noncommercial journals. The authors additionally had experience in editorial positions in these types of journals; one served as an editor-in-chief, while the other acted as a journal manager. Both these experiences inspired this research—the authors sought to understand more deeply how journals in similar situations operated. The intent was partly to inform the practices of their library publishing programs but additionally illuminate an area of research for which few studies had been conducted. The question "How do other journals do this?" was a refrain from working in library publishing programs but also from the authors' own editorial experiences.

Framework

The authors chose a narrative case study as their methodology. As Gillham and Tight note, case studies can consist of multiple individuals from across different organizations, but which are bounded by specific characteristics.[33] As such, the highly specific nature of our research question and study boundaries (i.e., Canadian, noncommercial academic journals) lent itself well to this approach. Additionally, previous survey-based work by the authors had identified areas of additional inquiry that would be best explored via interviews; in particular understanding organizational structure and affiliations. Gillham notes that interviews are best chosen as a data gathering technique when the questions are open-ended, require the use of prompts to clarify, and involve nuance.[34] How organizations structure and organize their activities is a highly nuanced topic, which requires many prompts for clarification. As such the authors chose semi-structured interviews as their interview method.

Participants were recruited via convenience sampling from a previous research study. Under a previous research project investigating labor and compensation for editorial board members in noncommercial, Canadian scholarly journals, the authors assembled a list of 485 journals and conducted a survey in the fall of 2020.[35] Survey participants had an opportunity at the end of the questionnaire to indicate interest in a follow-up, thirty to forty-five minute interview.

In spring 2021, the authors conducted fifteen interviews virtually with managing editors/editors-in-chief who had expressed interest. The authors obtained research ethics approval from McGill University (REB file # 21-01-040) and the University of Alberta (#Pro00100414_AME2) prior to conducting the interviews. The full list of questions is included in Appendix A. Prior to conducting the first interview, one of the authors undertook a practice interview with a past editor of a journal the met the study's inclusion criteria. The authors then revised and clarified the interview questions based on this experience.

The focal topic of the interviews was the "article," in particular the "peer-reviewed article," and the authors used chronology as the primary means to direct the interviews (e.g., walk us through the steps of an article from start to finish). The authors chose the article workflow as a primary means to chart organizational structure because it allowed participants to outline who did what work, while also articulating who had decision-making authority within the journal as well as any relationships the journal had with other parties (e.g., library, association, etc.). This method also allowed the participants to describe their journal processes tacitly and more naturalistically than being directly queried on these topics. The authors used additional, more targeted questions to assist participants in recalling tasks or structures that they have neglected to mention during their initial answers. They also used member checks throughout the research interview by paraphrasing the participants' responses, providing opportunities for additional clarification. The authors considered sending transcripts to participants following the research interviews, but this was not undertaken for two reasons: 1) it would put an additional burden on the participants' time; 2) there would be a considerable delay between the interview and the availability of the transcript, creating issues of memory and recall.

As the authors had developed a provisional codebook based on previous research,[36] the researchers employed a hybrid inductive and deductive approach to coding. For example, coding the person's position (e.g., editor-in-chief, managing editor, etc.) was based on the authors' previous survey work. However, other codes, such as some of the tasks undertaken by the journal, emerged naturally from the data (e.g., special projects). Saldãna notes that more than one coding methodology may be employed depending on the nature of the study. The researchers also employed analytic memos to record any additional observations during the coding process.[37]

Following the completion of the interviews, a research assistant transcribed the audio recordings; the transcriptions served as the primary data for analysis. The authors then coded the transcripts through an iterative, multicycle coding process.[38] The authors used a simultaneous coding process, allowing a single unit of data (i.e., a sentence) to have more than one code. For example, the authors might code a piece of data with both the person responsible for the task (e.g., editor-in-chief) and the task itself (e.g., assigning peer reviewers).

The first-stage coding process involved each researcher coding a single interview separately using a provisional codebook and definitions. The authors used attribute coding for demographic characteristics of the participant's journal (e.g., discipline, open access, etc.). After an initial coding of a sample of transcripts by both authors using consensus, they then discussed, refined, and updated the codebook based on themes found in the data.[39] As mentioned earlier, some codes were added that were not originally conceived (i.e., special projects as a task, training team members, etc.). Once the authors arrived at a final code book, all interviews were coded a second time by one author. Throughout the second-stage coding process, the researchers routinely met and discussed any questions that came up during the coding process. For example, the author undertaking the coding would highlight sections where there was uncertainty in coding for the second author to review and discuss together. Any revisions made to the codebook during this time were then retroactively coded. At the end of this process, the second author then reviewed this coding to enhance internal validity.

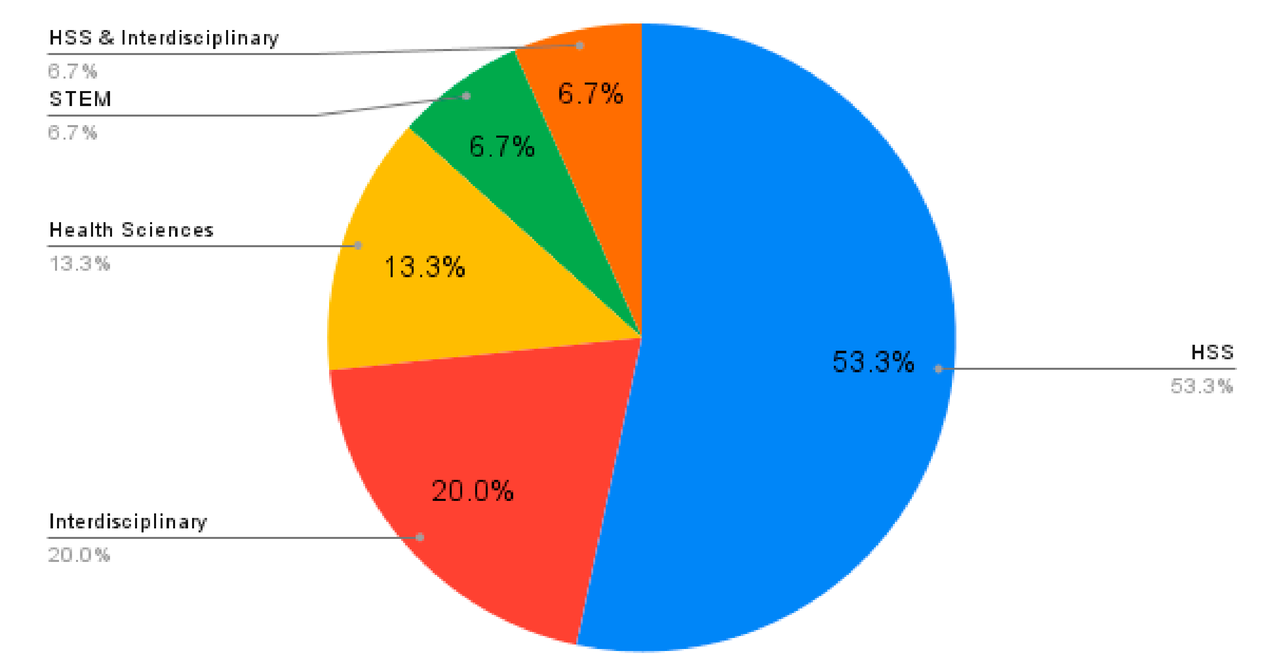
Prior to conducting the interviews, the authors triangulated information on the journal from their websites, such as the various positions and any stated relationships with associations, libraries, etc.

Results

Demographics

Interview participants identified themselves as either managing editors, editors-in-chief, or editors in an analogous leadership position (e.g., the journal did not formally use the title "editor-in-chief"). Eight journals identified themselves as humanities and social sciences (HSS) journals, while the remaining were either interdisciplinary (n=3), health sciences (n=2), or science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (n=1); one indicated it was both HSS and interdisciplinary.

FIGURE 1
Primary Journal Subject Areas



For the majority of journals (n=10), the editorial team ranged from five to fifteen members. Four journals had teams with more than fifteen members, and only one had fewer than five (see Appendix B for the full demographic breakdown of participants). Journals overwhelmingly operated on a "diamond open access" model. Fourteen of the fifteen journals were open access and charged no author fees. The remaining journal operated on a subscription model but made its contents available openly after a moving wall.

Organizational Structure: "We're an enriching democracy"

The majority of interview participants (n=9) spoke about collaboration and consensus-based decision-making rather than a formal reporting structure or hierarchy. An "enriching democracy" as one editor-in-chief remarked. Although the final decision-making authority or financial responsibility may rest with the editor-in-chief—a "final say"—it was not a top-down, hierarchical structure. These participants described a fluid organization, and three journals specifically used the term "flat" when asked to describe the journal's structure.

Within these self-described flat hierarchies, the participants often described a nucleus or inner circle that managed a greater part of the journal's strategy and decision-making. As one editor-in-chief described it, "…I'm the cop. I'm responsible, and I'm doing a lot of stuff in different places. And then it's essentially a very close collaboration between me and the scientific director on both strategy and then also the day-to-day operations".

Positions inside the nucleus were typically roles such as editor-in-chief, managing editors, and/or journal managers. Within these nuclei, almost all participants spoke about how the final decision-making authority and/or financial responsibility rested with the editor-in-chief role. One Managing Editor noted that "ultimately, everything reports to him [editor-in-chief] … The editor-in-chief has the final detail and everything, but most things happen on a sort of consensus basis". The journal "nucleus" allowed for the centralization of tasks, which, participants expressed, had its benefits (fewer people to rely on, easier to keep track of tasks). One participant stated that "we've ended up centralizing a lot on [name redacted]'s shoulders, my scientific director, because it's just more efficient". However, this could lead to tradeoffs. One interviewee spoke about how a smaller team means the journals lack some of the necessary "breadth of skills and disciplinary knowledge" that is needed to advise on some articles.

This is not to say that the organizational structure of these journals was fixed or unchanging. Several interviewees noted that the structure had shifted over time (or that they intended to make changes in the future), often due to increasing submissions or the influence of a new editor-in-chief. Most of the positions that were dropped were very specific in nature; for example, positions dedicated to handling indexing applications, generating ad revenue, or handling peer review. New positions were typically added when new money was received, or the increased workload made it necessary in order to operate.

Role of Editorial Advisory Boards: "I only send them the Christmas greetings"

Editorial advisory boards (sometimes referred to as editorial boards or scientific committees in interviews) presented an interesting relationship, as they were simultaneously part of the journal's organizational structure but often operated in an external consultative role.

The majority of journals (n=12) had an editorial advisory board, but how that board functioned and its role in the journal's operation varied greatly. Editorial advisory boards typically fulfilled their namesake "to advise," with one journal even "seeking out strategic advice in terms of ongoing changes". But many participants lamented that the editorial board was rarely consulted, and they expressed a desire to harness these boards more effectively. One editor-in-chief said, "I only send them the Christmas greetings" to represent their lack of engagement. Although they were rarely involved in the journal's day-to-day operations, advisory boards were seen to still play a role in demonstrating the legitimacy and prestige of the journal.

Compensation and Organizational Structure: "We wanted to be eligible for a SSHRC grant, honestly"

Several participants noted the influence of compensation and funding on which positions the journal had, as well as how tasks were divided among team members. One major theme was that a compensated position could take on more work, whereas tasks for volunteers were more carefully spread out. One participant spoke about how they had to "rotate with someone on the editorial team to take over the shepherding of the special issues." In contrast, another interviewee remarked that she was able to rely more deeply on the editorial assistant because the assistant held a permanent position at the university and was compensated.

Following the theme of compensation, interviewees expressed a desire to offer compensation so the journal would function better (e.g., "The journal would run better if the journal manager could be someone who is an employee working half time"). Not only would the journal be able to ask more of the role, but by providing some kind of compensation it would provide recognition for the work involved: "If I had a surplus budget, I'd start remunerating my editors as well. It wouldn't be a full salary, but I could, say, you know, a token of $1,000 a year or whatever to the editors to recognize their work. I would love to be able to remunerate not just the production people and the scientific director, but the other members of the editorial board".

It is worth noting that a number of journals brought up the impact of the Canadian government's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Aid to Scholarly Journals (ASJ) grant on their organizational structure. The grant has specific eligibility requirements[40] in terms of a journal's editorial structure, and accordingly several interviewees noted adding roles or changing their structure. When asked to expand on why they had recently added new members to the editorial team, one editor confessed "We wanted to be eligible for a SSHRC grant, honestly".

Staffing Challenges: "Not a job that is terribly attractive"

Throughout the interviews, participants cited staffing as one of the top challenges (n=12) when discussing organizational structure and workflow. Specifically, the difficulty in recruiting editorial team members (editors in particular) was noted by several interviewees. One interviewee bluntly said that "editorship is not a job that is terribly attractive." This was sometimes due to a small pool of candidates in a relatively new research field or because editorial work was not highly valued by the academy. In some cases, the challenges were very specific about locating editors who could handle bilingual (French/English) submissions; for journals with international submissions, there was a desire to better handle submissions from English-as-a-second-language authors. It was also noted that the work involved with constantly filling positions and training hires was a challenge.

The largest tasks and workflow challenges related to staffing in the journals were recruiting and managing peer review. Challenges with the peer review process have long existed, so it is not surprising that many journals (n=7) remarked how it was "the most time-consuming part of the process of guiding an article through…. It's just a nightmare". This included both recruiting peer reviewers and handling the follow-up and "chasing" reviewers.

While managing articles and publishing issues were the expected primary tasks of journals, throughout the interviews the authors mentioned several "extra-article activities" like indexing applications, anti-racist policy work, policy reviews, and social media strategy that existed outside the day-to-day aspects of publishing a journal issue. These tasks not only took a lot of time but also presented challenges, since they often didn't obviously fall to a specific editorial member. Several journals noted creating a special position to handle these kinds of tasks. For example, one journal created a managing editor position because it "needed somebody to help me with matters that weren't the day-to-day running of the journal. [sic] things like our copyright policy, or which aggregators should we be signed up with and how do we do that?" One of the key findings from the interviews was the extent of extra-article work involved in a journal and how often it was taken on by members of the editorial team, such as the editor-in-chief and managing editor, who may have unique subject expertise.

Relationships with External Organizations

Associations/Societies: "Dotted Lines"

Among the fifteen journals, most (n=11) talked about having a "dotted line" or "arm's-length" relationship with a scholarly association or society. In some cases, there was a clear and formal reporting structure (e.g., the journal was required to write formal reports, present at annual meetings, etc.); however, respondents overall were clear that the association/society had no formal decision-making authority within the journal. The relationship was often primarily transactional; the association provided funds and "brand recognition" for the journal but did not get involved in its day-to-day operations. Several respondents noted that in the case of a very serious issue (such as legal matters), the association/society would step in, but that the journal operated overall as a semi-autonomous body. Associations also acted as a larger overseeing/accountability body, but often as a "rubber stamp" for certain things like editorial appointments, policy changes, etc.

University Departments: "It's nice to know there's a lawyer there if we were to get sued"

Ten of the fifteen journals described having a relationship with a university department (not including the library). Some journals described how they were very embedded within a particular faculty or a university department. In two cases, the connection to the university was particularly close, since journal staff were also official employees of the university.

This is an extreme example, however; the relationship of most universities with a journal was that of oversight and accountability. This may include the press regularly reviewing the journals to ensure they met certain publication standards, or having the department steering committee approve big changes in the journal.

Most participants noted that their journals had informal relationships with their universities. Although not always financially supported by the university (though in a number of cases the university did provide funds to the journal), journals were still able to benefit from university resources if one of the editorial board members belonged to that institution. As one journal editor put it, "It's nice to know there's a lawyer there if we were to get sued" when referencing how they have access to institutional support such as legal services. More practically this assistance often materialized when universities assisted with journal activities such as managing expenses/invoices, handling grant money, providing a print address for mailers, supporting human resources for compensated positions, and allowing the journal to use university spaces for meetings, among other things.

Library Publishers: "Making sure that OJS works"

Despite our belief about the library's potential role in upending the scholarly publishing ecosystem, the reality in the interviews was that editors spoke about the library minimally, and participants described their relationship with library partners as one of technical support/hosting services that made "sure that OJS works" (n=10).

Beyond technical support, participants mentioned various one-off supports—one library assisted in promoting the journal on Twitter, another helped the journal get archived in a particular manner to meet specific scientific standards, and another commented on how the library kept the journal informed of various news/information in publishing. But these were ad-hoc rather than regular service offerings.

Five participants described library support in positive terms. As one put it, "they [the Library] were absolutely essential at the beginning, just getting us set up and holding my hand through all the designing a journal homepage…." A second interviewee noted that the library support was "fabulous, because they're [the library] now giving us better infrastructure support and a contact person I can talk to where there's a bug and they can do changes and not having to pay for that."

While appreciative of the library and its support, the library was discussed nominally overall in the interviews.

Discussion

Organizational Structure

Although there were common threads for how the journals organized their activities, it was interesting that specific models did not emerge for different types or sizes of journals. Of particular interest was reviewing how journals with larger volumes of submissions (100+) each approached their structure differently and had a different number of editorial team members. What they did have in common was compensating at least one position. While the compensated positions differed (e.g., journal manager, editorial assistant), it is worth pointing out that these were non-editorial positions—that is, journals that had money decided to hire someone to handle primarily administrative duties. In three cases, the position had "workflow management" as a part of its primary duties—e.g., keeping track of where submissions were in the process. The value of such positions was highlighted by one participant who noted they'd "be laughing" if they could get more money to pay for this position to work even more. As all four of these journals with larger volumes publish open access with no fees, this finding has implications for other diamond OA journals looking to scale up. How can journals without APC or subscription revenue fund administrative positions that help sustain? If diamond OA is the most equitable scholarly system for authors and readers, who is supplying the funds to support large-scale journals of this type? In the case of these four journals, it was either a Canadian government grant, a society, or the university itself. Sometimes an editor covered certain expenses with their own research grants.

The majority of journals used a self-described collaborative model for decision-making that, given the close relationship most journals have with the academy, may be an extension of the collegial governance models of universities. Collegial governance is best understood as how the academic work, including systems like peer review, is done with "the full participation of academic staff."[41] Perhaps it is not surprising that journals, which are composed primarily of academics, follow this model of decision-making and participation rather than hierarchical or "corporate" models of organization, with decision making and participation centered on a single individual or group of individuals in a "higher" position. This kind of collective or shared leadership model also benefits emerging technology spaces with an "accentuated need for motivation and employee morale," which we noted was a need for all journal editorial teams.[42] While some participants described their journals hierarchically, they represented a minority of the interviewees, and all journals exhibited at least some collective leadership qualities, such as communication, transparency and shared learning.

Structural Relationships

When reviewing the journals' relationships, the support that journals received from external bodies could be broadly classified as "accountability" or "infrastructure." Accountability relationships, like those with associations or universities, allowed the journals to operate autonomously or semi-autonomously while still having structures in place to oversee their activities and act as governing bodies. Infrastructure relationships provided access to fundamental pieces of the journals' operations, such as website hosting, publishing software, or access to institutional resources such as HR, financial services, legal services, and meeting rooms. There was also the provision of money to journals via universities or associations, which helped journals hire staff or pay for layout, copyediting, and other non-editorial tasks.

The journals clearly benefited from their relationships—whether financially, through "prestige" by proxy, or in access to institutional resources. The use and reliance on institutional supports, particularly those provided by universities, should come with a note of caution. As tenure-track positions decline, incoming editors will be less able to rely on or have access equally to such institutional support. This has potentially troubling downstream effects for equity in scholarly publishing, not only for those who can "afford" to participate but also who have access to institutional resources to keep open access journals operating with no subscription or author fees.

The authors advise stakeholders in noncommercial journal publishing to keep abreast of these trends and consider if there are alternate methods to provide access to institutional support that typically benefits those in tenure-track or full-time positions.

Recommendations for Library Publishers

During the interviews, participants described their editorial teams as primarily self-organizing bodies with a great deal of flexibility in terms of how they conduct their activities and construct their organizations. In fact, nearly half of the journal editorial teams we spoke to indicated things were going well in terms of how they operated, and there was nothing they would change.

Consultation and Community

What then can library publishers do to best support and grow scholar-led journals? One of the advantages of working with a library publisher is they work with a variety of journals that share common values. A recommendation would be for library publishers to leverage this knowledge and explicitly offer consultative services that help journals review how best to work and develop organizational structures and workflow for their specific goals and contexts based on other experiences. While many library publishing programs may do this on an ad hoc basis, based on the authors' experience it's rarely marketed as a specific skill or strength. For example, library publishers could provide a list of common journal tasks to incoming editors and coach them to think about who would be responsible for such work. In addition to consultation, library publishers are in an excellent position to facilitate conversations and foster community among journals, which could help introduce more equity, diversity, and inclusion best practices into a journal workflow. For example, one participant noted the challenge of incorporating anti-racist practices into their publishing and how they struggled to find good examples of what other journals were doing. The University of Florida has done exemplary work in this area by providing strong guidance and clearly laid out steps for journals hoping to incorporate more inclusive, equitable, and diverse practices in their work—is this a model for all library publishers?[43]

Expanding Library Publishing Services

As described previously, while interviewees who worked with library publishers expressed gratitude for the help and support of the library, these services were primarily viewed as "technical support." If libraries are serious about supporting an open and sustainable scholars-led publishing system, why not resource their publishing programs sufficiently so they can expand their offerings and grow their programs to include greater forms of support—for example, proactively handling some of the "extra article" services such as indexing applications, managing finances, or grant applications? Or providing extra-editorial work such as copyediting, layout, and publishing? With library publishers' deep knowledge of publishing practices, properly resourced programs could step up and assume more of the work that requires the publishing skillset and look into being a central hub for pooled resources.

While reviewing various relationships journals had, what was striking was the use of often invisible university administrative infrastructure to manage funds, access legal services, and even do mailings. This administrative infrastructure is often tied to the privilege of a tenured member of the editorial team and is not easily transferred. While many are lucky enough to benefit from those relationships, if library publishers could offer some of those same services it might make recruitment easier, since journal staff would not have to rely on (or require) institutional privilege.

The authors are cognizant that libraries are continually asked to "do more with less." We are not proposing that library publishing programs expand their services as they currently exist. Rather, we are calling on administrators and those in the scholarly community to think about what role library publishers *could* play in this ecosystem and what resources would be required to get them there. What do libraries gain from taking on more as publishers? Based on what we've learned, journal editorial teams are in a precarious place, and by providing more services we can help sustain a more equitable, open, scholar-led academy.

Limitations

This research should not be taken as indicative of all noncommercial journals, as it represents a small set of Canadian journals within the larger publishing landscape. The interviews were also limited to English-speaking participants only. While some francophone journals participated due to the bilingualism of the participant, this requirement reduced the participation of a particular population. Additionally, the authors only interviewed one member per journal, thus data reflects one person's perception—different people within an organization may have different perspectives of how the journal operates.

Finally, the authors did not engage in after-interview member checking, which would have provided participants with an additional opportunity to clarify/add/edit their comments and enhance confirmability of the findings. Finally, in employing interviews, the authors relied on participants' memory and recall, which may naturally have omitted details. Other more labor-intensive methods (such as journaling) may have captured such information but would have put a greater burden on participants.

Future Research

Given the limitations above, other studies from a wider range of noncommercial scholarly journals would be beneficial. These, for example, could explore how anti-racist practices can be built into journal organizational structures, what percentage of current journal editors are in tenure track (versus contract or unaffiliated) academic positions, and if those editors experienced different challenges in journal production and support.

It would also be interesting to see if commercial journals function in a similar manner to noncommercial ones: do they have similar, less, or greater support? What tasks do commercial publishers undertake on behalf of journals? Do they organize themselves differently and operate under different organizational structures? Is there qualitative or quantitative means by which to evaluate an "optimal" structure? This sort of information could provide library publishers with valuable information about the commercial publishing model and what value proposition library publishers could make to commercial journals to entice them to "switch." This could help in extending the current network of open and equitable journals.

Conclusion

Based on the authors' interviews with their respective editors, there is no singular organizational structure for these noncommercial Canadian journals. That stated, the journals tend to operate under collaborative models, and the majority harness external relationships to support them (although the amount of support varies).

While journal relationships with external organizations are critical, they were sometimes tied (precariously) to a single editorial member, meaning these supports could disappear if that editor leaves. This can compound existing difficulties when recruiting new editorial members, especially if there is also an expectation that they bring financial and/or institutional resources with them. Financial resources, in many cases, drive how the journals structure themselves, underscoring how these external relationships can quietly influence a journal's work.

By learning more about what kind of work goes into journals and how it is coordinated, library publishers can better understand how they can develop more sustainable services beyond technical infrastructure. As one participant noted, "One of the challenges for open access journals is in a view of being open access and not charging $3,000 for a publication, [is] that the institutions need to be providing more than just a little bit of tokenism, but the actual structure." What structure can library publishers provide? Alternatively, what advocacy can library publishers do in this vein to improve and increase existing structures? In a time of the increasing oligopoly of commercial publishers, library publishers have an excellent opportunity to build an open, equitable scholarly publishing ecosystem that increases the bibliodiversity of the scholarly publishing enterprise. To meet these aims, however, understanding how these journals operate is necessary for their continued support and survival.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

We have reviewed your journal's website in advance of the interview. Can you confirm the following?

Demographic information

1. Your journal is in X subject area (one of humanities and social sciences; health and life sciences; science, technology, engineering, and medicine; interdisciplinary)
2. Your journal produces X number of issues/year
3. Your journal is/is not open access
4. Your journal does/does not charge article processing charges (APCs)
5. How many submissions (approximately) does your journal receive each year? [note: question added after fourth interview]

Editorial team questions

6. From the journal's website, I see that there are X number of people, including these positions [list].
    a. Is that an accurate description of the editorial team?
    b. Or are there any positions missing from this description?
    c. Do these positions have formal job descriptions? Y/N
    d. Do they have term lengths?
7. What is the organizational structure of the journal (i.e., who reports to whom on the team)?
    a. Follow-up: Which team member(s) are responsible for distributing the journal's tasks to the team? Who determines the responsibilities of editors versus journal managers, etc.?
8. Are these positions volunteer or compensated?
    a. Prompt: Compensation may be monetary of in-kind (e.g., free conference registration, course relief, etc.).
    b. Prompt: Does that include receiving any institutional support (e.g., time off/course relief)? (or any other team members)
    c. Prompt: Do you know how many members of your journal team receive institutional support for their work on the journal? For example, are they able to work on the journal during their regular work hours/commitments or is their work on the journal considered outside their regular employment?
9. Walk me through the workflow of an article from submission to publication.
    a. Prompt: "What happens next?" or "Is there anything else you do during this task?" or "Are there times when you don't do this?" "Who is responsible for assigning or coordinating that task"?
10. Starting with your own position, describe the 1–3 most important tasks you undertake in this role.
    a. Are you able to rank them in order of importance?
    b. Of these tasks, in your opinion, which take up the greatest amount of time?
11. Describe the 1–3 most important tasks and responsibilities undertaken by other members of the team.
    a. Prompt: refer to the list of positions from Question 1

   b. Follow-up: Of these tasks, in your opinion, which takes up the greatest amount of time?
12. To your knowledge, has the journal ever changed its organizational structure?
   a. Prompt: For example, created a new position or got rid of one.
13. Is there anything you would like to change about the current way the journal works?
   a. If so, what would it be?
14. Do you experience any challenges related to staffing and the journal? If so, please describe.
   a. Prompt: For example, is the journal considering new positions? Retiring previous ones? Combining, etc.?
15. Up until now, we have focused on the regular activities of the journal. Are there any special projects the journal is currently undertaking? [note: question added after the second interview]

Supporting Organizations and Relationships

Preamble: As a part of this research, we want to learn more about the relationships journals have with external organizations.

16. According to your website, we noted the following relationships with external organizations:
   a. [interviewers state]
   b. Is that accurate?
   c. Describe the nature of this [these] relationship[s].
      i. Follow-up: Does this [these] organization[s] have any decision-making power with the journal?
      ii. Follow-up: Does the organization undertake any activities to assist the journal with its activities? (e.g., post positions, copyedit, publish issues, etc.)

Appendix B: Demographic Information

For anonymity purposes, the number of editorial team members and the number of submissions are given as ranges rather than specific numbers.

Position of Interviewee	Number of Editorial Team Members*	Submissions/ Year	Discipline	Open Access?
Co-lead editor	5–10	Unknown	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
Managing editor	Less than 5	Unknown	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
Editor-in-chief	5–10	Less than 20	Science, technology, engineering, math	Yes
Editor-in-chief	5–10	Unknown	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
Directeur de la revue	10–15	20–50	Interdisciplinary	Yes
Editor-in-chief	25–35	More than 100	Humanities & Social Sciences / Interdisciplinary	Yes
Editor-in-chief	25–35	More than 100	Health Sciences	Yes
Editor* (note this journal doesn't have a formal Editor-in-chief)	5–10	20–50	Humanities & Social Sciences	No
Editor (shared leadership position)	10–15	Less than 20	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
Managing Editor	23	20-50	Health Sciences	Yes
Journal manager	5-10	More than 100	Interdisciplinary	Yes
Editor-in-chief	25–35	Unknown	HSS	Yes
Editor-in-chief /journal manager	10–15	More than 100	Interdisciplinary	Yes
Lead editor	10–15	20–50	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
Managing editor	5–10	20–50	Humanities & Social Sciences	Yes
* Excluding the editorial advisory board				

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