Reviewer’s report

Title: Resolving authorship disputes by mediation and arbitration

Version: 1 Date: 15 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Zubn Master

Reviewer’s report:

The revised paper has made a significant improvement in discussing various shortcomings of the proposal outlined by all reviewers. While I am still not completely convinced of arbitration as a process that would be practically implemented in an academic setting, nonetheless, the concept of using arbitration, and now mediation, are novel and worthy of discussion among the broader academic community. Below, I provide a few minor comments for consideration.

1) In my original comments, I was concerned with the tangential commentary on authorship and lack of references surrounding authorship disagreements and strategies to prevent and resolve them. The author has provided a much better balance about authorship practices, the difficulty in resolving authorship disputes, and practicality of implementing the new proposed solution in the revised manuscript. In one of the responses, the author asked for specific references that I had in mind. As reviewer 2 points out, I do not like citing my own work during peer review but a couple of references are pertinent for this discussion. Moreover, a few of the references I had in mind are not provided and I think all of these are worthwhile reading and considering. I would ask that the author review these papers to consider if any of these approaches to resolving authorship disputes, or surveys surrounding authorship disputes or outcomes of authorship disputes are worthwhile mentioning in the manuscript.

Authorship disagreement:

Prevalence of scientific misconduct among a group of researchers in Nigeria.
Okonta P, Rossouw T.


Authorship: attitudes and practice among Norwegian researchers.
Nylenna M, Fagerbakk F, Kierulf P.

Authorship conflicts: a study of awareness of authorship criteria among academic plastic surgeons.
Reinisch JF, Li WY, Yu DC, Walker JW.

Alternative models to resolve authorship disagreement:


Models to Order Authors: There are several quantitative and other models that many have proposed. A couple I list below but if you see the reference by Smith and Master, it lists many of them. These are models as stated are to help order authors and are a preventive to authorship disputes.


Outcomes of authorship/publication ethics issues:

How do scientists perceive the current publication culture? A qualitative focus group interview study among Dutch biomedical researchers.


2) Comment only: Thank you for pointing out the idea of prevention versus resolving disputes. While some models to resolve authorship disputes have aspects of prevention, clarifying this distinction is most helpful in the revised manuscript.

3) In the revised paper, the author has made significant efforts to discuss the knowledge of arbitrators, who would pay for such services, and attempted to discuss much of how it would be
operationalized. But I still remain concerned as to whether the proposal of arbitration would be welcome in academia. While I think it is absolutely worthwhile to compare models in other sectors and apply them to academia, I would speculate that most academics would not welcome arbitration, perhaps because of their own misconceptions or visceral reactions of arbitration as being overly administratively burdensome or legalistic. As arbitration remains foreign to most academics, could the author provide any examples where arbitration has been used in academia, even if not for authorship? While its use in film and comics have been discussed, I do not consider these sectors to be very similar to academia - for example credit on a paper may not have thousands, to hundreds of thousands or more dollars at stake.

If no examples of arbitration in academia can be provided, would it be possible to add a few sentences only to comment on the likelihood of whether such a model would be welcome by scientists in different disciplines. Perhaps this would be a limitation for such a model - the potential slow or no uptake. I understand this will likely be speculative, but conceptualizing practical solutions for issues in research ethics is important and I would speculate that most academic researchers, research administration, or potentially even for-profit publishers would not welcome such a proposal.

4) Could some clarity be provided between when authorship disputes might be resolved through arbitration versus mediation? In my experience, authorship disagreements range in severity. I would assume that those authorship disputes which are significant and unresolvable are likely the ones that would require arbitration, whereas mediation may be used for less contentious or thornier disagreements. But perhaps I am mistaken. The example provided in the manuscript does not discuss the nature or illustrate the severity of the dispute and thus the reader may wonder when would mediation be called for and when would arbitration be needed. Because both models are now being considered, can the author provide an example or two, or outline the conditions, for when a researcher/journal might choose one or another alternative resolution model?

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