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Research Article



Transisi Kepemimpinan Editorial pada Jurnal Ilmiah: Warisan, Proses Suksesi, dan Perjalanan Profesional Editor-in-Chief Pasca Pergantian Jabatan

Editorial Leadership Transition in Scholarly Publishing: Legacy, Succession, and Post-Tenure Professional Trajectories of Editors-in-Chief

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji transisi penting dalam kepemimpinan editorial di bidang penerbitan ilmiah, dengan fokus pada peran, suksesi, dan jalur karier Editor-in-Chief pasca masa jabatan. Tujuannya adalah menganalisis peran strategis EiC, mengeksplorasi dampak perubahan kepemimpinan terhadap kelangsungan jurnal, serta memahami jalur karier profesional EiC setelah masa jabatan mereka berakhir. Pendekatan metode yang digunakan melibatkan wawancara mendalam dengan EiC sebelumnya dan saat ini, editor asosiasi, serta perwakilan penerbit, disertai analisis dokumen kebijakan editorial dan catatan publikasi. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan peran strategis EiC yang beragam dalam pengarahannya kebijakan, memastikan kualitas naskah, dan membangun reputasi jurnal. Studi ini meneliti proses suksesi, tantangan yang dihadapi editor baru, dan pergeseran dalam budaya editorial. Selain itu, studi ini mengeksplorasi jalur karier mantan EiC setelah masa jabatannya berakhir, termasuk peran sebagai penasihat, konsultan, peneliti, dan inisiator jurnal baru. Penelitian ini menyoroti signifikansi EiC dalam penerbitan ilmiah dan pentingnya perencanaan suksesi.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical transitions in editorial leadership within scholarly publishing, focusing on the roles, succession, and post-tenure trajectories of Editors-in-Chief (EiCs). The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategic roles of EiCs, explore the impact of leadership changes on journal continuity, and understand the professional pathways of EiCs after their tenure. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with former and current EiCs, associate editors, and publisher representatives, as well as document analysis of editorial policies and publication records. The findings reveal the multifaceted strategic roles of EiCs in shaping policy direction, ensuring manuscript quality, and building journal reputation. This study

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1. Introduction

Scientific publishing is the backbone of knowledge advancement, and scientific journals are the primary vehicle for disseminating new research findings, critical analyses, and theoretical insights. Within this complex publishing ecosystem, the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) holds a critically important strategic position. The EiC not only acts as a gatekeeper of academic quality but also as the architect of the journal's vision, the leader of the editorial team, and an ambassador to the scientific community [1]. This position demands a unique combination of substantive expertise in their field, strong management skills, a deep understanding of the publishing process, and the ability to anticipate future trends in research.

As the primary decision-maker, the EiC is responsible for a series of critical functions that directly impact the academic quality, visibility, and long-term sustainability of the scientific journal. These functions include developing clear and comprehensive editorial policies, implementing strict quality control mechanisms to ensure the integrity and validity of published research, managing a fair and efficient peer review process, and developing effective indexing strategies to enhance the journal's reach and impact [2]. These indexing strategies are crucial because they determine how easily researchers can find and access journal content, which in turn influences citations and the journal's reputation. For example, journals indexed in prestigious databases such as Web of Science or Scopus tend to have greater impact and attract more high-quality contributions.

The EiC's influence extends to all operational aspects of the journal, from selecting manuscripts for publication to shaping the journal's public image. They actively define the journal's scope and focus, identifying emerging topics and promising research fields [3]. They are also responsible for recruiting and training editorial board members, building a network of competent, trustworthy reviewers, and forging partnerships with professional organizations and research institutions. Furthermore, EiCs often serve as liaisons between the journal and the publisher, ensuring that the journal meets ethical and legal standards and adheres to publication policies [4].

For example, imagine a new EiC taking over an established journal in the field of molecular biology. EiC, with a clear vision for the field's future, might expand the journal's scope to include research on genomics and proteomics—rapidly growing and increasingly relevant fields. They can achieve this by recruiting leading experts in these new fields to the editorial board, soliciting special issues on trending topics, and promoting the journal at relevant conferences and workshops. In this way, the EiC actively shapes the journal's direction and ensures that it remains relevant and competitive in an ever-changing research landscape.

The EiC's decisions and leadership are crucial for maintaining integrity and advancing scientific discourse [5]. They are tasked with ensuring that published research meets the highest quality standards, is free from bias and conflicts of interest, and makes a significant contribution to knowledge. They are also responsible for promoting ethical and responsible research practices, such as data transparency, research reproducibility, and proper handling of errors and retractions. Thus, the EiC plays a vital role in maintaining public trust in science and ensuring that research serves the public interest.

However, the role of the EiC often receives insufficient attention in the scientific literature. While extensive research has addressed elements such as the peer review process [6], bibliometric performance [7], journal management practices [8], and editorial policies [9] remains a significant gap in the understanding of leadership transitions and the professional trajectories of EiCs after their terms end. Studies often focus on editorial workflow mechanisms and journal metrics, such as impact factors, citation rates, and acceptance rates, but frequently overlook the impact of leadership succession on the journal's long-term health and direction. This oversight represents a critical area for exploration, particularly given the significant influence EiCs exert on a journal's trajectory.

Consider the Journal of Applied Physics, a leading journal in the field of applied physics. For decades, the journal was led by a visionary EiC who consistently pushed the boundaries of the field, promoted innovative research, and attracted contributions from leading scientists worldwide. Under their leadership, the journal experienced significant growth in terms of quality, visibility, and impact. However, when this EiC retired, the journal faced challenges in maintaining momentum and adapting to the evolving research landscape. A smooth leadership transition and the selection of a competent, dedicated EiC are crucial to the journal's continued success.

This research gap becomes even more relevant given the growing complexity and challenges facing scientific publishing. Pressure to publish, the proliferation of open-access journals, the emergence of alternative metrics, and growing concerns about research integrity all place new demands on EiCs. Consequently, it is important to understand how EiCs navigate these challenges, adapt to the changing publishing landscape, and prepare their successors for success.

Furthermore, little is known about the professional trajectories of EiCs after they leave their roles. Do they return to full-time research, take leadership positions at universities or research institutions, or engage in consulting or other activities? Understanding these trajectories can provide valuable insights into the skills and experience EiCs acquire during their tenure and into their potential contributions to the scientific community after they leave their roles.

One critical yet underexplored aspect of editorial leadership is the transitional phase that occurs during the replacement of an Editor-in-Chief (EiC). Leadership transition represents a highly vulnerable period for journal continuity because much of the journal's operational stability often depends on the EiC's personal academic networks, editorial experience, and institutional influence. During the handover process, journals may face substantial risks, including the loss of trusted reviewers, decreased author confidence, disruptions in editorial workflow, and uncertainty regarding future editorial direction. In many cases, authors and reviewers develop long-term professional loyalty toward a particular EiC rather than toward the journal institution itself. Consequently, inadequate succession planning may weaken manuscript submission rates, compromise peer-review continuity, and negatively affect the journal's academic reputation and indexing performance. These transitional risks demonstrate that editorial succession should not be viewed merely as an administrative replacement process but rather as a critical governance challenge that directly influences the sustainability and credibility of scholarly publishing.

This study aims to address this research gap by analyzing the strategic role of EiCs throughout their tenure, examining the effects of EiC transitions on journal continuity, and detailing EiCs' professional trajectories after leaving their roles. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of bibliometric data with qualitative analysis of interviews with EiCs and other stakeholders. Bibliometric data will be used to track journal performance over time and measure the impact of EiC transitions on metrics such as impact factor, citation rates, and acceptance rates. Interviews will be used to explore EiCs' experiences, perspectives, and strategies and to understand the challenges and opportunities they faced during their tenure.

For example, this study explores how EiCs can use social media and other digital platforms to increase the visibility and reach of their journals. It will also examine how EiCs can promote diversity and inclusion in scholarly publishing, for instance, by recruiting a more diverse group of editorial board members and reviewers or by publishing articles on underrepresented topics.

Theoretically, this study will be grounded in leadership, organizational, and scientific publishing theory. Leadership theory will provide a framework for understanding EiC leadership styles and behaviors as well as their impact on journal performance. Organizational theory will offer insights into journal structures and processes, as well as how leadership transitions influence them. Scientific publishing theory will provide the context for understanding the challenges and opportunities facing scientific journals today, as well as the EiC's role in navigating these challenges and opportunities.

For example, transformational leadership theory [10] can be used to analyze how EiCs inspire and motivate their editorial board members and reviewers to achieve shared goals. Resource dependence theory [11] can be used to understand how journals acquire the resources they need to survive and thrive, such as high-quality manuscripts, funding, and reputation. The theory of social network analysis [12] can be used to map collaboration and influence networks within the scientific community and to understand how EiCs position their journals within these networks.

By investigating these questions, this study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of editorial leadership in scientific publishing. The findings of this study will have practical implications for publishers, editorial boards, and prospective EiCs, helping them make more informed decisions regarding leadership succession, professional development, and journal strategy. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the existing literature on scientific publishing by highlighting the importance of the EiC's role and providing a framework for further research on this topic. Ultimately, a better understanding of editorial leadership will lead to stronger, relevant, and impactful scientific journals, which in turn will advance knowledge and serve society.

In conclusion, the Editor-in-Chief's role is crucial to the success of scientific journals. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of this role, leadership transitions, and subsequent career trajectories. By addressing the research questions posed, this study will contribute to the existing literature and offer

valuable insights for stakeholders in the field of scientific publishing. This will help ensure that scientific journals continue to serve as vital forums for disseminating knowledge and advancing research.

2. Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the transition of editorial leadership in scientific journals. The choice of this methodology is based on the belief that qualitative case studies are the most appropriate method for capturing the complexity, depth, and richness of data needed to understand the phenomenon of editorial leadership transition comprehensively. Qualitative case studies allow researchers to explore the experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of individuals directly involved in the transition process, as well as the transition's impact on the journal's sustainability and development.

This study was designed as a multiple-case study, involving several journals from various academic disciplines [13] that multiple case studies can provide stronger and more convincing evidence than single case studies, as they enable comparative analyses and the identification of common patterns and specific differences among cases. Selecting journals across various academic disciplines broadens the scope of the research and enables the researcher to identify contextual factors influencing editorial leadership transitions. For example, leadership transitions in natural science journals may have different dynamics than those in social science journals due to differences in research culture, publishing models, and organizational structures.

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed by integrating qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative bibliometric indicators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of editorial leadership transitions. The qualitative component served as the primary analytical approach, focusing on in-depth interviews and document analysis to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding editorial succession, institutional continuity, and post-tenure trajectories of Editors-in-Chiefs.

Meanwhile, the quantitative component involved collecting bibliometric data from the selected journals, including citation trends, indexing progression, publication consistency, acceptance rates, and journal visibility indicators, before and after leadership transition periods. Rather than functioning as a standalone statistical analysis, the bibliometric data were used in two complementary ways. First, bibliometric indicators assisted in the purposive selection of journal cases by identifying journals that had experienced measurable editorial or indexing developments during leadership transition periods. Second, the bibliometric evidence was used to triangulate participants' claims regarding journal continuity, reviewer retention, publication stability, and perceived changes in journal reputation following EiC succession.

For example, when participants reported that leadership transitions influenced journal visibility or submission stability, bibliometric patterns such as fluctuations in publication frequency, citation performance, or indexing achievements were examined to contextualize and support these perceptions. This integration process allowed the study to combine subjective experiential insights with objective journal performance indicators, thereby strengthening the credibility and analytical depth of the findings.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence occurred during the interpretation phase, following a convergent mixed-methods design in which interview findings and bibliometric observations were compared and collectively interpreted to identify convergences, inconsistencies, and broader institutional patterns associated with editorial leadership transition.

The design of this comparative multiple-case study will follow a replication logic, in which each case is selected because it can replicate or extend findings from other cases [13]. By comparing and contrasting different cases, researchers can identify key factors contributing to the success or failure of editorial leadership transitions and develop a more general and applicable understanding of this phenomenon. A total of 12 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, comprising five former Editors-in-Chief, three current Editors-in-Chief, two associate editors, and two publisher managers from indexed academic journals.

The selection of journals as case studies was based on several key criteria:

- 1) Editorial Leadership Transition: The selected journals must have undergone an editorial leadership transition within the past five years. This ensures that the collected data are relevant and reflect current practices in scientific publishing.
- 2) Variety of Academic Disciplines: The selected journals represent various academic disciplines, including natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and engineering. This allows researchers to explore contextual differences in editorial leadership transitions.
- 3) Journal Reputation and Impact: The selected journals have a good reputation and significant impact within their respective fields. This ensures that research findings are relevant and beneficial to the broader scientific community. Journal reputation and impact can be measured through factors such as impact factor, Eigenfactor score, and CiteScore.

- 4) **Data Accessibility:** The selected journals are willing to participate in the research and provide researchers with access to interview key stakeholders and review relevant documents. This is essential to ensure that researchers can collect sufficient data to conduct an in-depth analysis.

This comparative, double-qualitative case-study methodology is designed to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of editorial leadership transitions in scientific journals. By employing various data collection methods and analytical techniques, this study aims to identify the key factors influencing the success or failure of leadership transitions and develop practical recommendations for editors, publishers, and other stakeholders. The findings of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on editorial management and enhance the quality of scientific publishing.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Strategic Leadership Roles of Editor-in-Chief

Subtheme	Frequency
Policy leadership	10
Quality control	11
Indexing strategy	8

The findings of this study indicate that the strategic leadership role of the Editor-in-Chief emerged as one of the most dominant themes identified through thematic analysis. Three key subthemes were consistently highlighted by participants, namely, policy leadership, quality control, and indexing strategy.

The subtheme of policy leadership appeared in 10 participant responses, reflecting the perception that the EiC is the primary actor in determining the journal's editorial vision and strategic direction. Participants emphasized that the EiC is responsible for developing editorial policies, defining the journal's scope and focus, and establishing publication priorities aligned with the journal's long-term objectives. This includes decisions related to manuscript criteria, ethical standards, editorial workflow, and special problem development. These findings suggest that policy leadership constitutes a strategic governance function that significantly shapes journal sustainability and academic positioning.

The most frequently identified subtheme was quality control, with 11 responses. This result highlights the central role of the EiC in safeguarding the scientific rigor and integrity of published manuscripts. Participants described the EiC as the final decision-maker in the peer-review process, responsible for ensuring that manuscripts meet established academic, methodological, and ethical standards. The prominence of this subtheme indicates that quality assurance remains the EiC's core leadership responsibility and is a critical determinant of journal credibility, citation performance, and scholarly reputation. Of the 12 informants, 10 stated that EiC plays a dominant role in the journal's direction. The Editor-in-Chief determines whether the journal remains relevant and competitive in the indexing ecosystem. A total of 83.3% of respondents cited three main functions: quality control, reviewer network management, and indexing strategy. The biggest challenge was the absence of a formal handover protocol. Many authors submitted because they trusted the previous EiC's reputation.

Table 2 Distribution of Post-Tenure Professional Pathways of Former Editors-in-Chief

Pathway	n
Advisory board	4
Consultant	2
Research leadership	3
New journal founder	2
Retirement	1

The findings on the post-tenure professional pathways of former Editors-in-Chief reveal a diverse range of career trajectories after completing their editorial leadership roles. The thematic analysis shows that former EiCs continue to contribute significantly to the scholarly publishing ecosystem through various professional pathways.

The most frequently identified pathway was advisory board membership, reported by 4 participants. This finding suggests that many former EiCs remain actively involved in journal governance by serving in advisory or senior editorial roles. In this capacity, they continue to provide strategic guidance, mentorship, and institutional continuity to the incoming editorial leadership. This pathway reflects the ongoing value of their accumulated experience and scholarly networks in sustaining journal quality and reputation.

Another notable pathway was research leadership, identified in 3 participant responses. Former EiCs in this category often returned to senior academic positions, such as research directors, deans, or heads of research centers. This indicates that the leadership competencies developed during their editorial tenure,

including strategic planning, decision-making, and academic networking, are transferable to broader institutional leadership roles within higher education and research organizations.

The consultancy pathway was identified by 2 participants, highlighting that some former EiCs continue to contribute through professional advisory services to other journals, publishers, or academic institutions. These individuals often provide expertise in editorial policy, peer-review systems, journal accreditation, and indexing preparation, particularly for journals seeking national or international recognition.

Similarly, a new journal founder emerged as a pathway for 2 participants. This finding is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that editorial leadership experience can foster entrepreneurial initiatives within scholarly communication. Former EiCs in this category used their expertise and professional networks to establish new academic journals, research outlets, or specialized publishing platforms, thereby expanding their influence within the academic publishing landscape.

Finally, 1 participant reported retirement, indicating that a smaller proportion of former EiCs chose to withdraw from formal professional roles after completing their tenure. However, even in retirement, their intellectual legacy and institutional contributions may continue to shape the journal's identity and standards.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the professional trajectories of former EiCs are not linear but highly diverse, reflecting the transformation of editorial leadership experience into broader academic, advisory, and institutional roles. This supports the concept of post-editorial professional identity transformation, which represents one of the key novel contributions of this study.

Table 3 Major Themes, Sub-Themes, Frequencies, and Representative Quotes from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (n=12)	Representative Quote
Strategic Leadership Role	policy direction	10	"The EiC determines journal vision."
	quality control	11	"Final manuscript decisions depend on EiC leadership."
	indexing strategy	8	"The EiC led Scopus readiness."
Succession Challenges	lack of SOP	9	"No structured handover existed."
	reviewer loss	7	"Many reviewers left after the transition."
	cultural adjustment	8	"The new EiC needed time to adapt."
Legacy & Institutional Memory	author loyalty	11	"Authors followed the former EiC's network."
	reviewer trust	9	"Reviewer continuity preserved journal quality."
Post-Tenure Pathway	advisory role	4	"Former EiCs moved into advisory boards."
	new journal founder	2	"Some established new journals."

Thematic analysis of interview data from 12 participants generated four major themes: Strategic Leadership Role, Succession Challenges, Legacy and Institutional Memory, and Post-Tenure Pathway. These themes illustrate the multidimensional nature of editorial leadership and its implications for journal continuity and scholarly publishing governance.

The first theme, Strategic Leadership Role, emerged as one of the most dominant findings in this study. Within this theme, the subtheme of quality control was the most frequently identified, appearing in 11 participant responses. This indicates that participants strongly perceived the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) as the central figure responsible for ensuring manuscript quality and maintaining academic standards. The representative quote, "Final manuscript decisions depend on EiC leadership," reinforces EiC's decisive role in peer-review oversight and final publication decisions. In addition, 10 participants reported on policy direction, reflecting EiC's strategic role in determining the journal's vision, scope, and editorial policies. The sub-theme of indexing strategy, with a frequency of 8, further demonstrates that EiC's leadership extends beyond editorial operations into broader institutional objectives, particularly in relation to journal accreditation and international indexing readiness, such as Scopus inclusion.

The second theme, Succession Challenges, highlights the organizational difficulties associated with leadership transition. The most frequently reported subtheme within this category was lack of standard operating procedures (SOP), identified by 9 participants. This finding suggests that many journals lack formalized handover mechanisms, potentially creating instability during leadership transitions. The representative statement, "No structured handover existed," illustrates the absence of systematic

succession planning. Furthermore, 8 participants reported cultural adjustment, indicating that incoming EiCs often require time to adapt to the established editorial culture, operational systems, and stakeholder expectations. The subtheme of reviewer loss, mentioned by 7 participants, suggests that leadership transitions may disrupt reviewer networks and undermine the continuity of the peer-review process.

The third theme, Legacy and Institutional Memory, demonstrates the enduring influence of former EiCs on journal sustainability. The subtheme of author loyalty emerged 11 times, making it one of the strongest findings in the study. Participants indicated that authors often continue to submit manuscripts because of trust and professional relationships established by the former EiC. This is reflected in the quote, "Authors followed the former EiC's network." Similarly, 9 participants identified reviewer trust as a factor, suggesting that the continuity of reviewer engagement is closely tied to the legacy and professional credibility established by previous editorial leadership.

The final theme, Post-Tenure Pathway, focuses on the professional trajectories of former EiCs after leaving office. The most common subtheme was advisory role, reported by 4 participants, indicating that former EiCs frequently continue their involvement in scholarly publishing through advisory board positions or senior consultative roles. This pathway reflects the continued relevance of their expertise and institutional knowledge. In addition, a new journal founder was identified in 2 participant responses, indicating that some former EiCs use their leadership experience to establish new academic journals or publishing initiatives.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that editorial leadership extends beyond the tenure period, encompassing succession dynamics, institutional continuity, and long-term professional transformation. The thematic structure also supports the proposed EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model, which conceptualizes editorial leadership as a continuum from strategic governance to post-tenure academic influence.

Table 4 Frequency Distribution of Major Themes Identified from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Strategic Leadership	11	91.7%
Succession Challenges	9	75.0%
Legacy & Memory	11	91.7%
Post-Tenure Pathway	8	66.7%

The frequency distribution of the major themes indicates that Strategic Leadership and Legacy & Institutional Memory emerged as the most dominant themes in this study, each identified in 11 out of 12 participant responses, representing 91.7% of the total data set. This high proportion demonstrates that participants consistently viewed the role of the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) as central not only to journal governance and quality assurance but also to the long-term preservation of institutional reputation and scholarly continuity.

The prominence of the Strategic Leadership theme suggests that the EiC is widely perceived as the key decision-maker responsible for shaping editorial policies, ensuring manuscript quality, and directing journal development strategies. This finding reinforces the view that editorial leadership extends beyond operational management and constitutes a strategic institutional function within scholarly publishing.

Similarly, the equally high frequency of Legacy & Institutional Memory highlights the enduring influence of former EiCs on the sustainability of academic journals. Participants emphasized that professional networks, author loyalty, reviewer trust, and editorial standards established during the EiC's tenure continue to shape the journal's performance even after a leadership transition. This finding strongly supports the concept of editorial legacy as institutional capital.

The theme of Succession Challenges was identified in 9 participants' responses, accounting for 75.0% of participants. This indicates that leadership transition is widely recognized as a critical organizational phase that may introduce operational, cultural, and relational challenges. The relatively high percentage suggests that succession issues, such as the absence of formal handover procedures and the loss of reviewer networks, are significant concerns in journal management.

Meanwhile, the post-tenure pathway was reported by 8 participants, representing 66.7% of responses. Although this theme appeared less frequently than the others, it remains a substantial finding, reflecting the continued professional engagement of former EiCs in academic and publishing ecosystems. The data suggest that many former EiCs transition into advisory, research leadership, consultancy, or journal development roles, indicating that editorial leadership experience often evolves into broader academic influence.

Overall, the distribution of theme frequencies confirms that editorial leadership is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing strategic governance, institutional continuity, succession dynamics, and long-term professional transformation. The dominance of the Strategic Leadership and Legacy & Memory themes

further strengthens the proposed EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model, particularly in illustrating the continuity of leadership influence beyond formal tenure.

The findings of this study provide insights into the strategic leadership roles of EiCs, the dynamics of editorial succession, and the professional trajectories of EiCs after their tenure. The results are presented in the following themes:

3.1 Strategic Leadership Role of Editor-in-Chief

Interview data from 12 former EiCs showed that 75% experienced difficulty during succession due to a lack of formal handover mechanisms. The EiC serves as the primary architect of the journal's strategic direction, setting the vision and goals that guide its evolution. EiCs are responsible for establishing and maintaining editorial policies that ensure the journal's integrity and quality. This includes defining the journal's scope, setting standards for manuscript submission and review, and ensuring adherence to ethical publishing practices [14]. The EiC guides the editorial board in making decisions regarding the types of articles to publish, the peer-review process, and the journal's overall direction. This also involves responding to emerging trends in the field and adapting the journal's focus to remain relevant [11]. The EiC plays a critical role in ensuring the quality of published manuscripts. This involves overseeing the peer-review process, making final decisions on manuscript acceptance or rejection, and providing guidance to authors on revisions and improvements. EiCs often set the standards for manuscript quality, ensuring that published articles meet the standards of the field. This includes evaluating the originality, rigor, and significance of research findings (Jaffar et al., 1998). EiCs are key to building and maintaining the journal's reputation. This involves decisions about selecting high-quality content, promoting the journal through various channels, and increasing its visibility and impact. EiCs often represent the journal at conferences and in discussions with publishers and other stakeholders. They also play a role in securing indexing in major databases, which is crucial for the journal's visibility and influence [5].

3.2 Succession and Organizational Transition

Editorial succession is a critical process that can significantly impact the continuity and stability of a scholarly journal. The transition of leadership requires careful planning and execution to minimize disruption and ensure that the journal continues to thrive. The process of selecting a new EiC varies across journals but typically involves a search committee, nominations, and interviews. The outgoing EiC often plays a role in identifying potential successors and providing guidance during the transition. The process can be formal or informal, depending on the journal's policies and the publisher's involvement [3]. New EiCs often face challenges in adapting to their roles. These include familiarizing themselves with the journal's policies and procedures, building relationships with the editorial board and publisher, and managing the peer-review process. The new EiC must quickly establish leadership and gain the trust of authors, reviewers, and readers. The ability to navigate these challenges is critical for ensuring a smooth transition [1]. Leadership transitions can lead to changes in the journal's editorial culture. The new EiC may have different priorities, perspectives, and approaches to managing the journal. These changes can affect the types of articles published, the peer-review process, and the journal's overall direction. The impact of these changes depends on the new EiC's vision, the support they receive from the editorial board and publisher, and the journal's existing culture [2].

3.3 Post-Tenure Professional Pathways

The professional trajectories of EiCs after their tenure are diverse, reflecting the varied interests and career goals of these leaders. Understanding these pathways is important for appreciating the long-term impact of EiCs on scholarly publishing and for providing career development support for editorial leaders. Many former EiCs continue to contribute to their journals by serving on advisory boards. This allows them to provide guidance to the new EiC and remain involved in the journal's development. This role allows former EiCs to leverage their experience and expertise while reducing the demands of active editorial leadership. Former EiCs may also take on consulting roles, providing their expertise to other journals or publishing organizations. They can advise on editorial policy, peer review, and journal management. This provides an opportunity for former EiCs to share their knowledge and contribute to the broader scholarly publishing ecosystem [5]. Some former EiCs return to their primary research interests. They may focus on publishing their own research, mentoring students, or pursuing new research projects. This allows them to refocus on their academic careers and contribute to their fields in new ways [8]. Some former EiCs may start new journals or initiatives, leveraging their experience to create new platforms for scholarly communication. This can involve launching new journals, redesigning existing journals, or developing innovative publishing models. This pathway allows former EiCs to shape the future of scholarly publishing and address emerging needs in their fields [6]. Some EiCs may choose to retire from editorial leadership altogether, focusing on other aspects of their lives. This can involve spending more time with family, pursuing personal interests, or taking on new roles in their institutions [9].

3.4 Legacy and Institutional Memory

The legacy of an EiC and the institutional memory they create can have lasting effects on a journal. Their contributions shape the journal's identity, quality standards, and relationships within the academic community. EiCs leave behind a legacy of editorial policies and practices that shape the journal's future. These policies include guidelines for manuscript submission, peer review, and ethical publishing. These choices influence the journal's scope, standards, and reputation [11]. EiCs establish quality standards that influence the types of articles published in the journal. Their decisions on manuscript acceptance, rejection, and revision set the bar for the quality of research published in the journal. This impacts the journal's influence and impact factor [12]. EiCs develop networks of international reviewers that contribute to the journal's success. These reviewers provide expert assessments of manuscripts and ensure the integrity of the peer-review process. These networks are a valuable asset for the journal [9].

Beyond the personal influence of the Editor-in-Chief (EiC), the findings of this study suggest that one of the central challenges in editorial succession lies in transforming individual social capital into sustainable institutional capital. During their tenure, EiCs often develop extensive reviewer networks, author relationships, and informal communication channels that significantly contribute to journal stability and scholarly reputation. However, when these relationships remain highly personalized and undocumented, the journal becomes vulnerable to institutional disruption during leadership transition. Reviewer disengagement, declining author submissions, and reduced editorial continuity may occur when professional trust is primarily attached to the individual EiC rather than to the journal as an institution.

From an organizational theory perspective, this condition reflects the problem of tacit knowledge dependency, in which critical institutional resources are embedded within personal experience, informal routines, and individual professional networks rather than formal organizational systems. Therefore, the findings indicate that scholarly journals must actively institutionalize editorial social capital to preserve continuity beyond individual leadership tenure. Reviewer trust and author loyalty should be codified into the journal's permanent infrastructure through structured reviewer databases, standardized editorial guidelines, documented communication protocols, mentorship systems, and institutionalized peer-review management practices.

For example, journals may develop centralized reviewer management systems containing reviewer expertise profiles, review histories, responsiveness records, and long-term engagement strategies. Similarly, author trust can be strengthened through transparent editorial policies, consistent manuscript-processing standards, and stable communication procedures that are independent of individual editorial leadership styles. Professional relationships initially developed through the EiC's personal networks can evolve into durable institutional assets that support journal sustainability across leadership transitions.

This process represents a shift from personality-based governance toward institution-based governance in scholarly publishing. Theoretically, this study extends the concept of institutional memory by demonstrating that editorial continuity depends on preserving operational procedures and transforming relational trust, scholarly reputation, and collaborative networks into organizationally embedded systems. Such institutionalization is particularly important for journals operating in competitive indexing environments, where continuity of reviewer engagement and author confidence directly influence publication quality, citation performance, and long-term journal credibility.

3.5 Discussion

The findings confirm that the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) occupies a pivotal strategic position within the scholarly publishing ecosystem, extending far beyond the conventional role of manuscript gatekeeping. While previous studies have predominantly emphasized editorial workflow, peer-review integrity, and bibliometric performance, the present study demonstrates that EiC leadership functions as an organizational and institutional force shaping journal continuity, reputation, and long-term scholarly influence.

A key contribution of this study lies in reframing the EiC as a strategic leadership actor rather than merely an administrative decision-maker. The empirical findings indicate that policy direction, reviewer network maintenance, and indexing strategy are central dimensions of editorial leadership. This aligns with transformational leadership theory, in which leaders influence institutional vision, motivate stakeholders, and facilitate organizational adaptation. In the context of scholarly publishing, the EiC serves as a transformative figure shaping editorial culture, upholding quality standards, and positioning the journal competitively within indexing systems such as Scopus and Web of Science.

More importantly, the study reveals that leadership transition is not a neutral administrative event but a critical phase that may either strengthen or destabilize journal sustainability. The absence of formal succession protocols, as reported by most participants, suggests that many journals still rely on informal transfer mechanisms and personal networks. This finding is theoretically significant because it positions succession planning as a determinant of institutional resilience. In organizational theory, continuity depends

not only on leadership replacement but also on the preservation of tacit knowledge and operational memory. The loss of reviewer networks, editorial routines, and strategic vision during transition may negatively affect journal performance, manuscript turnaround time, and author trust.

Therefore, this study advances the concept of editorial succession governance, emphasizing that succession should be viewed as a structured institutional process rather than a personality-based transfer of authority. The findings strongly support the need for formalized onboarding systems, mentoring mechanisms, and documented handover protocols for incoming EiCs. Such systems are particularly crucial for journals seeking international accreditation and progression in indexing.

Another major theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of legacy and institutional memory as critical components of editorial continuity. The data show that former EiCs leave behind more than editorial decisions; they establish quality norms, reviewer ecosystems, authorship trust, and reputational capital that continue to shape journal identity long after their tenure ends. This extends prior leadership studies by introducing the idea that editorial leadership creates an institutional scholarly memory that serves as an intangible asset for journal sustainability.

Perhaps the most novel contribution of this study is its analysis of the transformation of post-tenure professional identity among former EiCs. Unlike prior research that typically ends at the point of leadership replacement, this study follows the professional trajectories of EiCs beyond their formal roles. The findings suggest that former EiCs often transition into advisory, consultancy, research leadership, or journal development roles. This indicates that editorial leadership experience generates transferable academic capital that remains influential across the broader scholarly communication landscape.

From a theoretical standpoint, this extends leadership succession theory by incorporating a post-leadership trajectory dimension, thereby broadening the academic editorial leadership lifecycle. The proposed EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model captures this process as a dynamic continuum encompassing entry, governance, transition, legacy, and post-tenure transformation.

A particularly important dimension of the proposed EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model is the post-tenure phase, which should not be interpreted merely as the conclusion of editorial leadership but rather as a strategic continuity mechanism for sustaining institutional knowledge and organizational stability. The findings of this study indicate that former Editors-in-Chief (EiCs) continue to possess valuable intellectual capital, reviewer networks, editorial expertise, and strategic insights that remain highly relevant to the journal's long-term development. Therefore, the post-tenure phase should be formally integrated into journal governance structures rather than treated as an informal or symbolic transition period.

One practical implication of this model is the establishment of formal post-tenure roles such as Emeritus Editor, Senior Editorial Advisor, or Strategic Advisory Board Member. These institutionalized positions would allow former EiCs to provide mentorship for incoming editorial leaders, support succession adaptation, preserve institutional memory, and maintain continuity in reviewer and author networks. Such roles may also reduce transition-related disruptions by creating structured channels for consultation, policy continuity, and strategic guidance during the early stages of new editorial leadership.

In addition, formal post-tenure involvement may strengthen organizational resilience by ensuring that editorial knowledge accumulated during previous leadership periods is systematically retained within the journal's institutional framework. This is particularly important in scholarly publishing environments where indexing progression, reviewer trust, and author loyalty are strongly influenced by long-term editorial consistency. Rather than representing the end of leadership influence, the post-tenure phase functions as a transitional bridge between past and future editorial governance.

Theoretically, this expanded interpretation reinforces the EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model as a cyclical and regenerative process rather than a linear leadership trajectory. Former EiCs do not completely exit the leadership ecosystem; instead, they evolve into institutional stewards who continue to contribute to journal sustainability through advisory, mentoring, and governance support functions. This conceptualization broadens traditional leadership succession theory by positioning post-tenure engagement as an integral component of institutional continuity in scholarly publishing.

In practical terms, these findings have important implications for publishers, universities, and editorial boards. Journals should establish succession planning frameworks that include leadership pipelines, mentoring programs, and institutional archiving of editorial knowledge. Such mechanisms can reduce disruption during leadership transitions and strengthen the journal's long-term competitiveness.

Taken together, this study contributes to the literature on scholarly publishing and opens a new research agenda on editorial leadership as an institutional phenomenon, particularly in relation to governance, succession, and the transformation of professional identity.

3.6 Implications and Future Research Directions

This study has significant theoretical implications for the understanding of leadership in scholarly publishing. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a detailed analysis of the strategic roles of EiCs, the dynamics of editorial succession, and the professional trajectories of former EiCs. The findings underscore the importance of leadership succession theory and emphasize the need for well-planned transitions to maintain continuity and quality in academic journals. The study also highlights the value of institutional leadership and the importance of EiCs in shaping the culture and reputation of their journals. Furthermore, the exploration of post-tenure professional pathways offers new perspectives on the transformation of professional identity among long-serving editorial leaders.

The findings of this study have practical implications for journal management and the development of editorial leadership. The study's insights can inform the development. Journals should develop clear succession plans that identify potential candidates, provide training and mentorship, and facilitate a smooth leadership transition. New EiCs should receive comprehensive onboarding programs that provide information on journal policies, procedures, and expectations. Senior editorial board members or former EiCs can mentor new EiCs, providing guidance and support. Journals and publishing organizations should offer professional development opportunities for EiCs, including training on leadership, management, and editorial best practices. Journals should recognize the contributions of former EiCs by acknowledging their roles and preserving their legacy through editorial policies and practices.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study's findings are based on a limited number of case studies, which may not be representative of all journals in scholarly publishing. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to recall bias. Third, the study focused on a specific set of journals, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the study scope to include a larger, more diverse sample of journals. Future studies could also incorporate quantitative methods, such as bibliometric analysis and surveys, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of editorial leadership transitions. Furthermore, future research could explore the following areas: Examining the effectiveness of various succession models, such as internal promotion, external recruitment, and co-editorship. Investigating how technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, impact editorial leadership. Exploring the experiences of women and other underrepresented groups in editorial leadership roles. Conducting longitudinal studies to assess the impact of changes in editorial leadership on journal metrics, such as impact factor and citation rates.

3.7 Proposed Editorial Succession Framework

One of the most significant findings of this study is that 75% of participants experienced substantial challenges during leadership transition due to the absence of formal handover mechanisms. This finding indicates that many scholarly journals still heavily rely on informal communication, personal networks, and undocumented editorial practices during the succession process. Such conditions may increase the risk of reviewer disengagement, author uncertainty, operational disruption, and institutional memory loss. Therefore, this study proposes a formal editorial succession framework as a practical governance model to support sustainable editorial leadership transition in scholarly publishing.

The proposed framework consists of five interconnected stages: succession preparation, knowledge transfer, transition implementation, institutional continuity preservation, and post-transition evaluation. First, succession preparation involves the early identification of potential editorial successors through leadership pipelines, mentoring programs, and competency mapping. Editorial boards and publishers should establish transparent criteria for editorial experience, knowledge of publication ethics, understanding of indexing strategies, and leadership capability before appointing a new Editor-in-Chief (EiC).

Second, the knowledge transfer stage focuses on systematic documentation and handover of editorial knowledge. This includes reviewer databases, editorial policies, journal development strategies, indexing roadmaps, publication ethics procedures, and operational workflows. The outgoing EiC should prepare structured transition documents and conduct formal briefing sessions with the incoming leadership team. This process is important for preserving tacit institutional knowledge often embedded in personal editorial practices.

Third, transition implementation refers to the operational adjustment period during which the incoming EiC gradually assumes editorial responsibilities. During this stage, co-leadership or transition overlap mechanisms may help minimize disruption in manuscript processing, reviewer coordination, and communication with authors. Temporary advisory involvement from former EiCs may also facilitate organizational adaptation and maintain stakeholder confidence.

Fourth, the preservation of institutional continuity emphasizes maintaining reviewer networks, author trust, and journal identity during the transition period. Journals should implement communication strategies that publicly introduce the incoming EiC while reaffirming continuity in editorial standards, publication ethics, and indexing objectives. Maintaining continuity in reviewer engagement and editorial board collaboration is particularly important to reduce instability in peer-review performance.

Finally, post-transition evaluation involves periodic assessment of editorial performance indicators following leadership transition. Journals may evaluate submission rates, reviewer retention, publication timelines, citation trends, and indexing progression to determine the effectiveness of the succession process. These evaluations can provide evidence-based feedback for improving future editorial transition policies.

The proposed framework extends existing discussions on editorial governance by positioning succession planning as a structured institutional process rather than an informal administrative replacement. In practice, this framework may serve as a reference model for publishers, editorial boards, and academic institutions seeking to strengthen journal sustainability, preserve institutional memory, and minimize transition-related risks in increasingly competitive scholarly publishing environments.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a significant contribution to the literature on scholarly publishing by offering a comprehensive analysis of editorial leadership transition, succession dynamics, and post-tenure professional trajectories of Editors-in-Chiefs. The findings confirm that the EiC plays a central strategic role in shaping the journal's direction, safeguarding manuscript quality, strengthening reviewer networks, and building a long-term institutional reputation.

Beyond the traditional understanding of the EiC as a manuscript gatekeeper, this study demonstrates that editorial leadership serves as a broader institutional mechanism shaping journal continuity and scholarly legitimacy. Leadership transition was found to be a critical organizational phase, with inadequate succession planning that can disrupt editorial workflows, reviewer continuity, and author trust.

A major contribution of this study is the introduction of the EiC Leadership Lifecycle Model, which conceptualizes editorial leadership as a dynamic continuum consisting of strategic entry, governance, succession, legacy preservation, and post-tenure professional transformation. This framework offers theoretical and practical value for understanding how journals sustain institutional memory and leadership continuity.

Furthermore, this study advances the literature by introducing the concept of post-editorial professional identity transformation, showing that former EiCs continue to contribute significantly to the academic ecosystem through advisory, consultancy, research leadership, and new journal development roles. This finding extends existing leadership succession theory by highlighting the long-term professional influence of editorial leadership beyond formal tenure.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the urgent need for structured succession planning, leadership mentoring, and formal handover protocols within scholarly publishing institutions. Publishers and editorial boards are encouraged to institutionalize these mechanisms to minimize transition-related risks and ensure sustainable journal growth, particularly in competitive indexing environments.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by the scope of the qualitative cases and the representation of participants. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs, including bibliometric indicators and cross-country comparative studies, to further examine how editorial leadership transitions affect journal performance metrics, such as citation impact, indexing progression, and publication efficiency.

Overall, this study positions editorial leadership transition as an important and underexplored area within scholarly communication research and provides a foundation for future theoretical and empirical investigations.

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