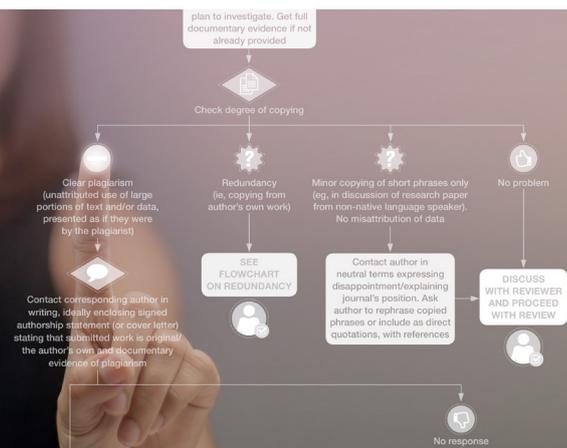


COPE FLOWCHARTS AND INFOGRAPHICS (FULL SET - ENGLISH)



These flowcharts and infographics are designed to help editors follow COPE's Core practices and implement its advice when faced with cases of suspected misconduct. For more information visit: <https://cope.onl/core>



Allegations of misconduct

- 2 [Reviewer suspected to have appropriated an author's ideas or data](#)
- 3 [Responding to whistleblowers when concerns are raised directly](#)
- 4 [Responding to whistleblowers when concerns are raised via social media](#)



Authorship and contributorship

- 5 [Changes in authorship
Addition of extra author – before publication](#)
- 6 [Changes in authorship
Removal of author – before publication](#)
- 7 [Changes in authorship
Addition of extra author – after publication](#)
- 8 [Changes in authorship
Removal of author – after publication](#)
- 9 [Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript](#)
- 10 [How to spot authorship problems](#)
- 11 [How to recognise potential authorship problems](#)



Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

- 12 [Undisclosed conflict of interest in a submitted manuscript](#)
- 13 [Undisclosed conflict of interest in a published article](#)



Data and reproducibility

- 14 [Fabricated data in a submitted manuscript](#)
- 15 [Fabricated data in a published article](#)
- 16 [Image manipulation in a published article](#)



Ethical oversight

- 17 [Suspected ethical problem in a submitted manuscript](#)



Intellectual property

- 18 [Plagiarism in a submitted manuscript](#)
- 19 [Plagiarism in a published article](#)



Journal management

- 20 [General approach to publication ethics for the editorial office](#)
- 21 [Systematic manipulation of the publication process](#)
- 22 [Systematic manipulation of the publication process \(Cont.\)](#)
- 23 [Systematic manipulation of the publication process suspected before publication](#)
- 24 [Systematic manipulation of the publication process suspected after publication](#)



Peer review processes

- 25 [What to consider when asked to peer review a manuscript](#)
- 26 [Peer review manipulation suspected during the peer review process](#)
- 27 [Peer review manipulation suspected after publication](#)
- 28 [How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process](#)



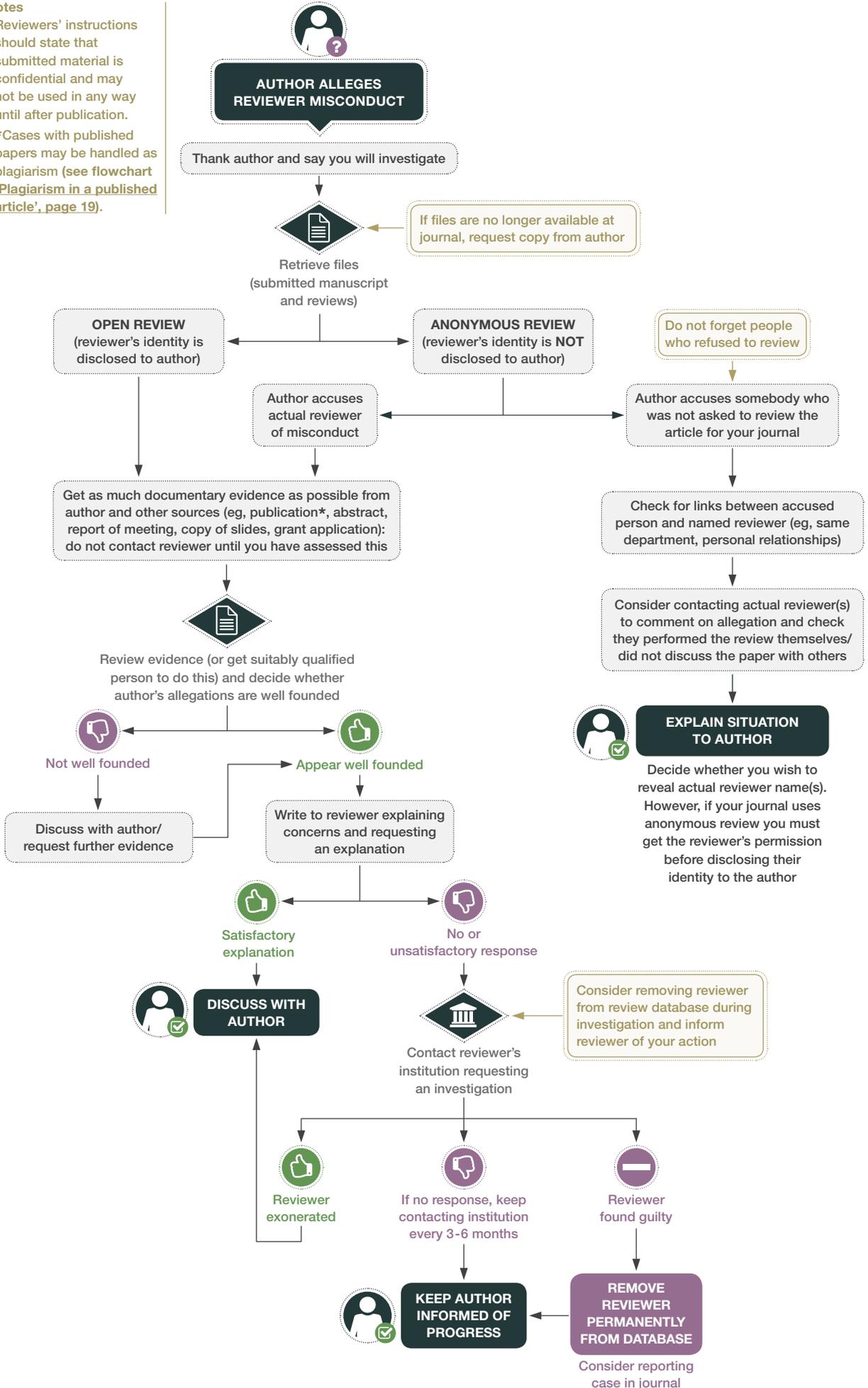
Post-publication discussions and corrections

- 29 [Redundant \(duplicate\) publication in a submitted manuscript](#)
- 30 [Redundant \(duplicate\) publication in a published article](#)

REVIEWER SUSPECTED TO HAVE APPROPRIATED AN AUTHOR'S IDEAS OR DATA

Notes

- Reviewers' instructions should state that submitted material is confidential and may not be used in any way until after publication.
- *Cases with published papers may be handled as plagiarism (see flowchart 'Plagiarism in a published article', page 19).



2

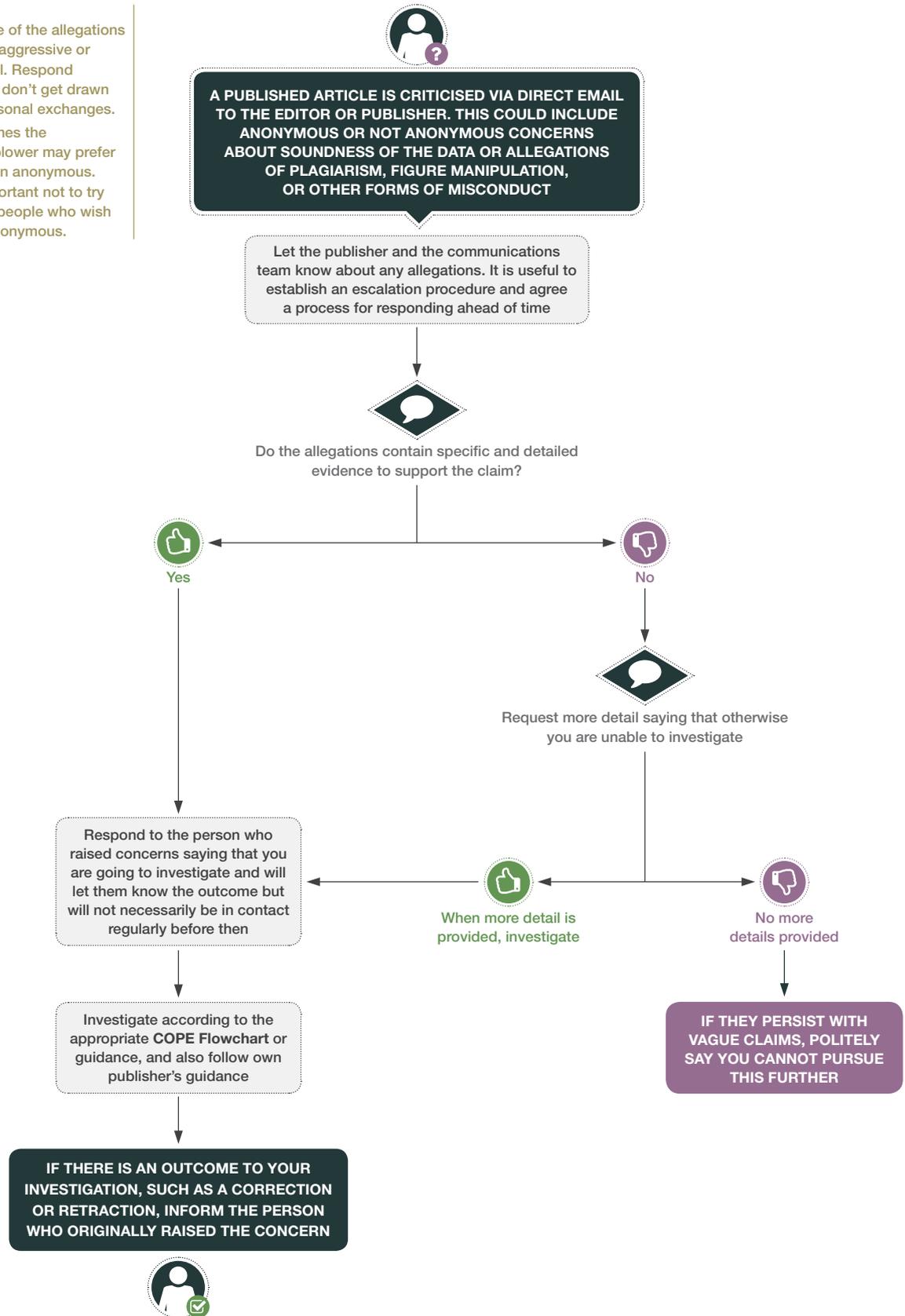
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RESPONDING TO WHISTLEBLOWERS
WHEN CONCERNS ARE RAISED DIRECTLY

Notes

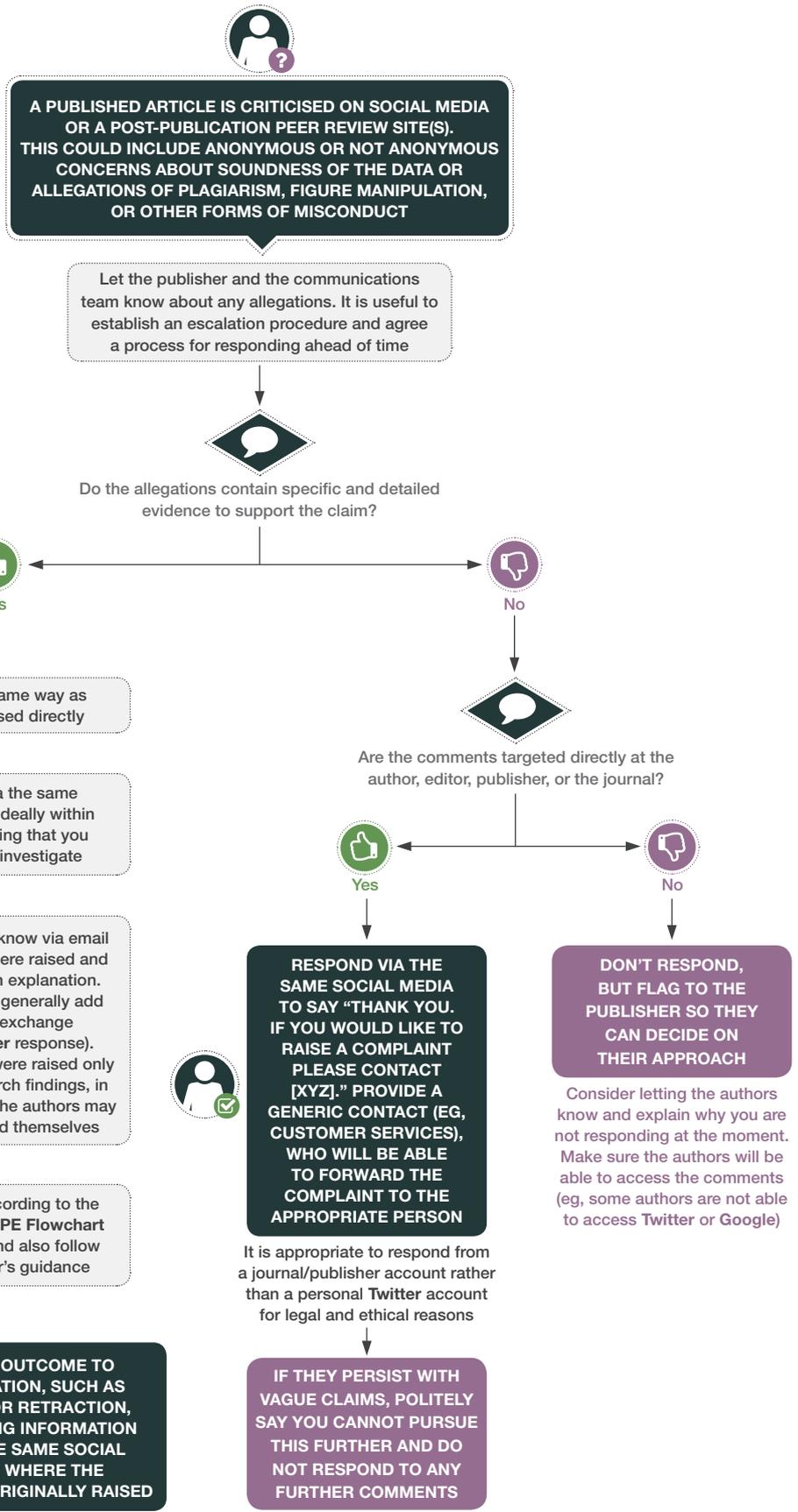
- The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges.
- Sometimes the whistleblower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to 'out' people who wish to be anonymous.



**RESPONDING TO WHISTLEBLOWERS
WHEN CONCERNS ARE RAISED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA**

Notes

- The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don't get drawn into personal exchanges.
- Sometimes the whistleblower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to 'out' people who wish to be anonymous.
- It is important to take the discussion away from the public domain; don't engage in specific discussions on social media.

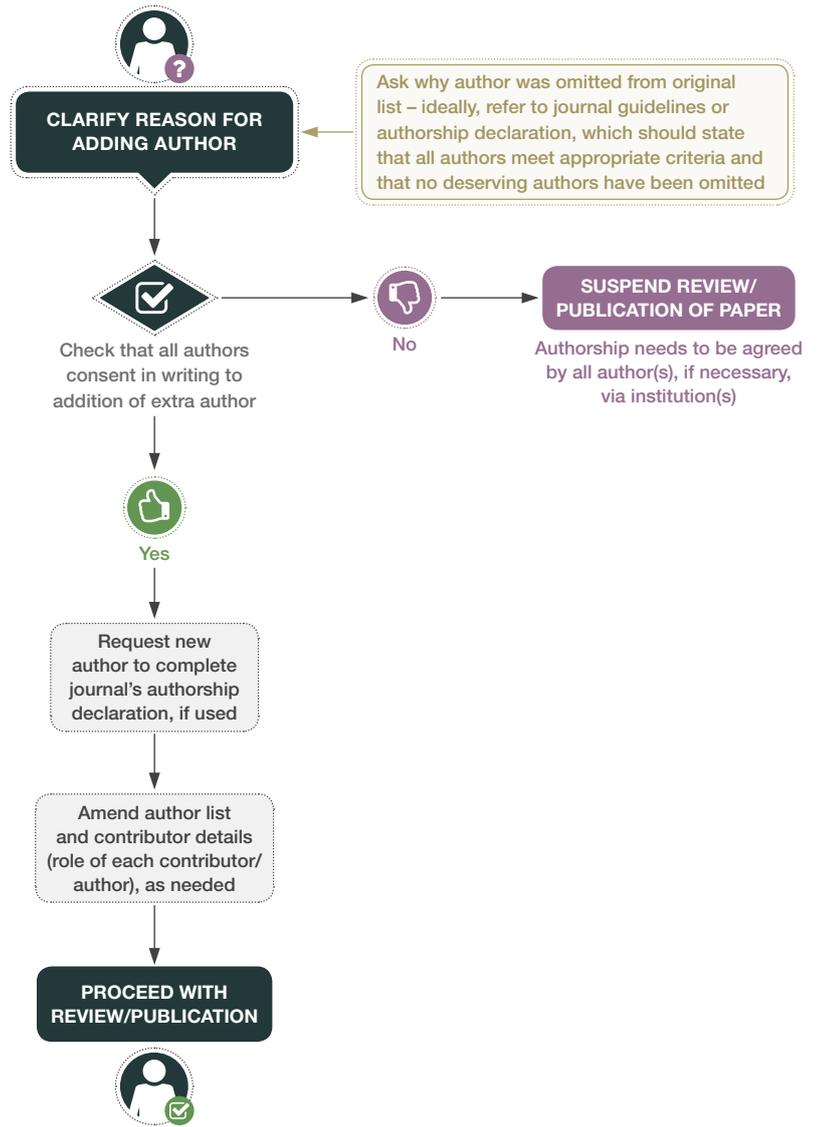


It may not be appropriate for Twitter but useful on other sites. Post a link to the resolution on the journal site

CHANGES IN AUTHORSHIP
ADDITION OF EXTRA AUTHOR — BEFORE PUBLICATION

Notes

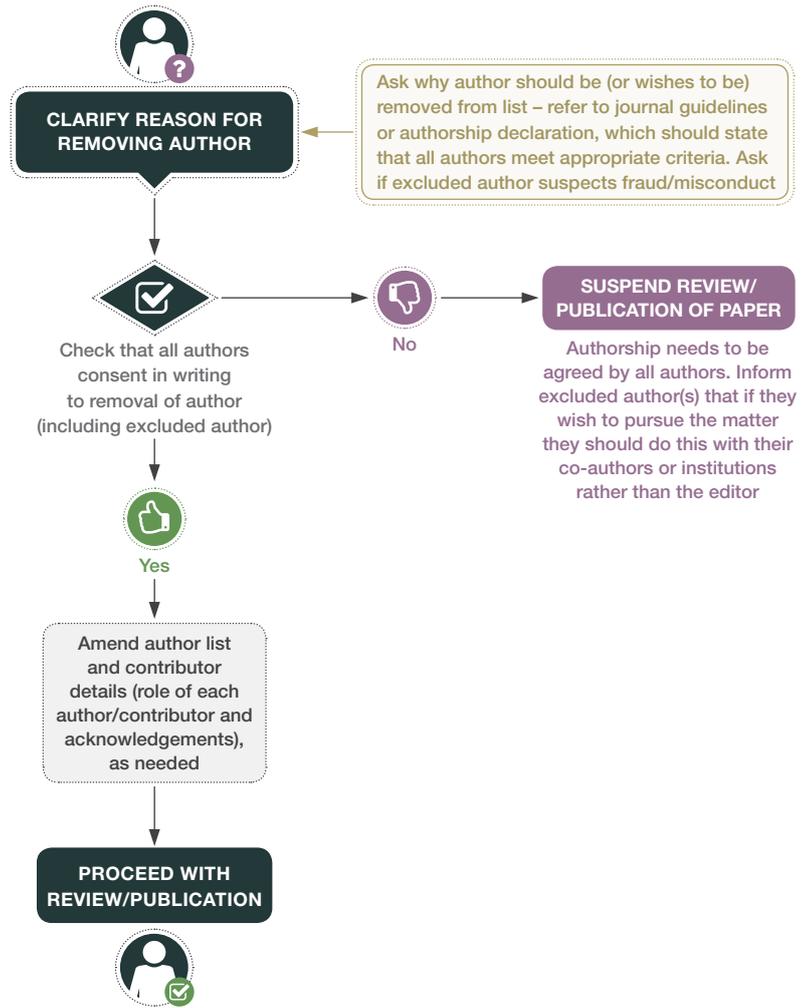
- See also flowchart on '[Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript](#)' (page 9) as requests for authorship changes may indicate presence of a ghost, guest, or gift author.
- Major changes in response to reviewer comments (eg, adding new data) might justify the inclusion of a new author.



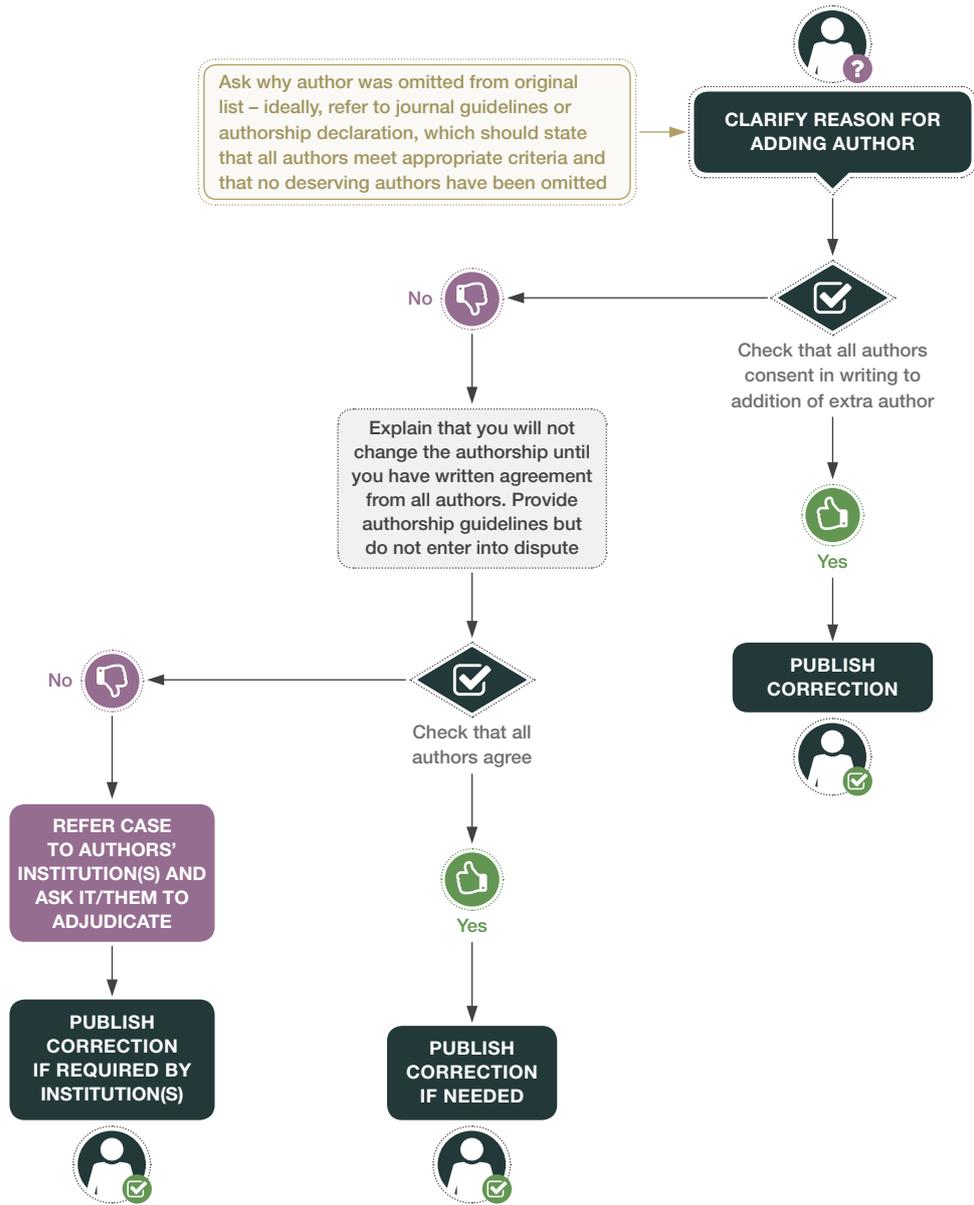
CHANGES IN AUTHORSHIP
REMOVAL OF AUTHOR — BEFORE PUBLICATION

Notes

- See also flowchart on ‘[Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript](#)’ (page 9) as requests for authorship changes may indicate presence of a ghost, guest, or gift author.
- Most important to check with the author(s) whose name(s) is/are being removed from the paper and get their agreement in writing.

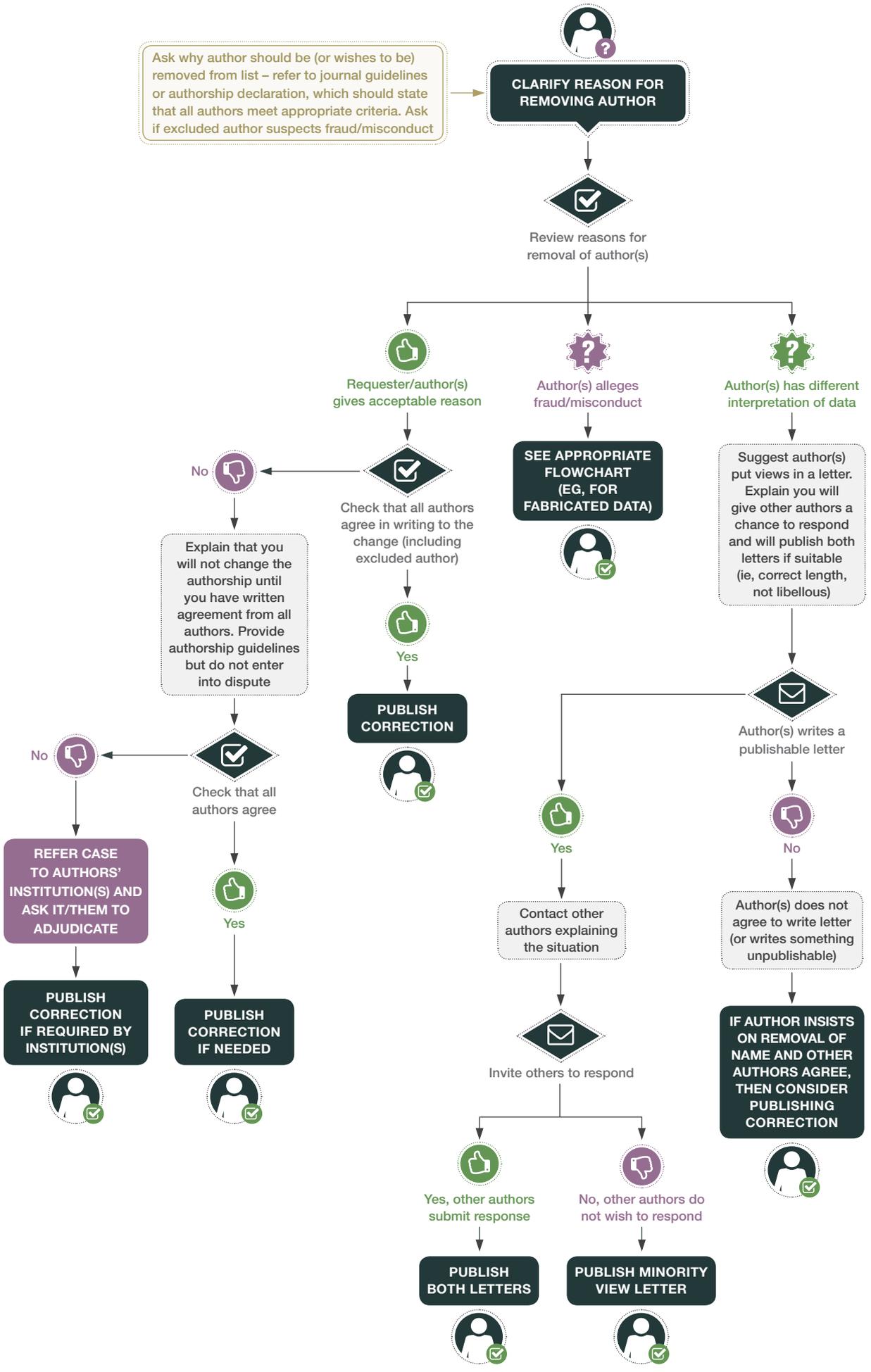


CHANGES IN AUTHORSHIP
ADDITION OF EXTRA AUTHOR – AFTER PUBLICATION



CHANGES IN AUTHORSHIP
REMOVAL OF AUTHOR – AFTER PUBLICATION

Ask why author should be (or wishes to be) removed from list – refer to journal guidelines or authorship declaration, which should state that all authors meet appropriate criteria. Ask if excluded author suspects fraud/misconduct

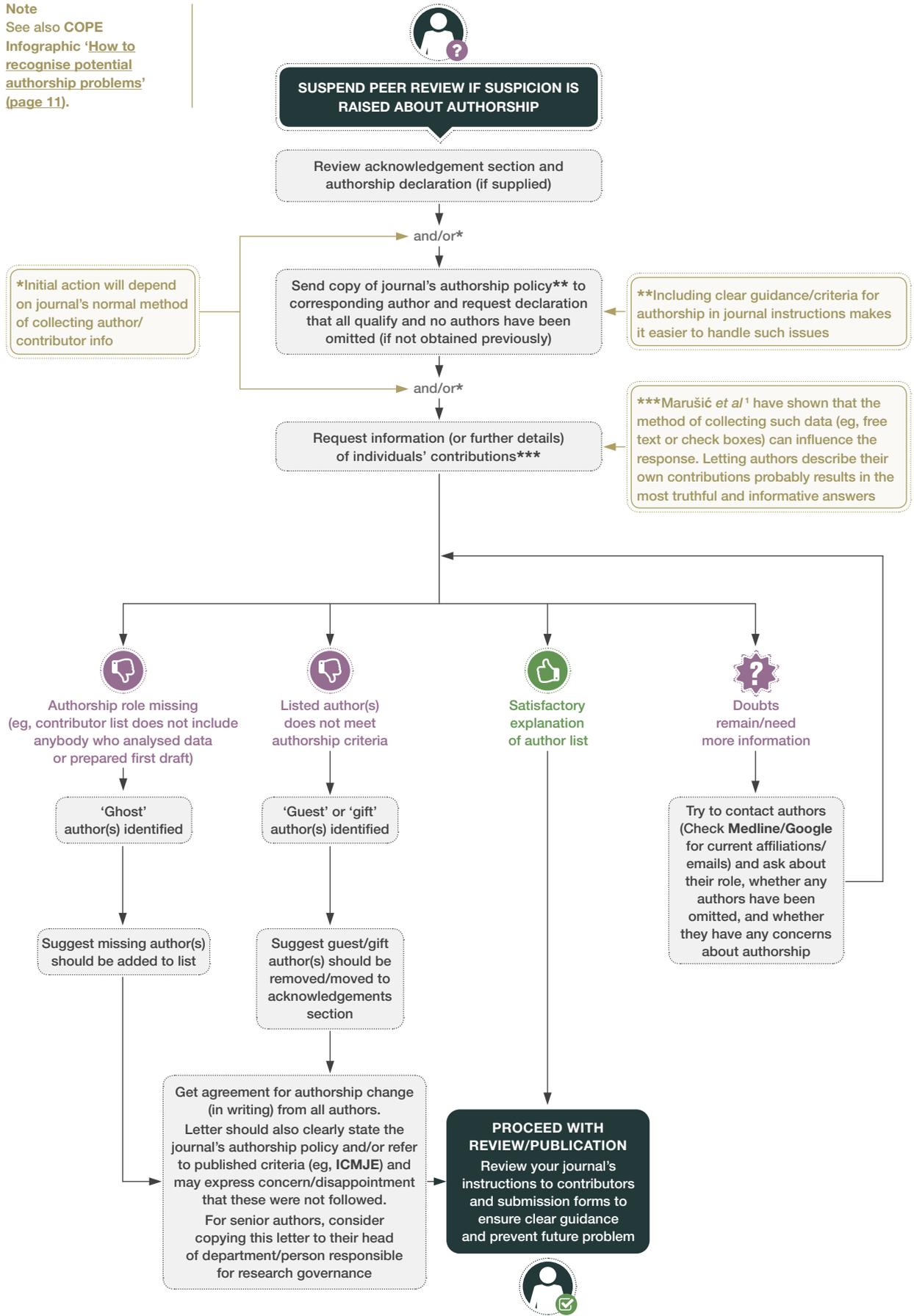


8
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**GHOST, GUEST, OR GIFT AUTHORSHIP
IN A SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT**

Note
See also COPE
Infographic 'How to
recognise potential
authorship problems'
(page 11).



9
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publicationethics.org



Reference

1. Marušić A, Bates T, Anić A, et al. How the structure of contribution disclosure statements affects validity of authorship: a randomised study in a general medical journal. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2006;22:1035-44. <https://doi.org/10.1185/030079906x104885>

Links to other sites are provided for your convenience but COPE accepts no responsibility or liability for the content of those sites.

Editors cannot police author or contributor listings for every submission but may sometimes have suspicions that an author list is incomplete or includes undeserving (guest or gift) authors. The **COPE Flowchart ‘[Ghost, guest, or gift authorship in a submitted manuscript](#)’ (page 9)** suggests actions for these situations. The following points are designed to help editors be alert for inappropriate authorship and spot warning signs which may indicate problems.

Type of authorship problems

A ghost author is someone who is omitted from an authorship list despite qualifying for authorship. This is not necessarily the same as a ghost writer, since omitted authors often perform other roles, in particular data analysis. Gøtzsche *et al*¹ have shown that statisticians involved with study design are frequently omitted from papers reporting industry funded trials. If a professional writer has been involved with a publication, it will depend on the authorship criteria being used whether they fulfil the criteria to be listed as an author. Using the **ICMJE** criteria for research papers, medical writers usually do not qualify as authors, but their involvement and funding source should be acknowledged.

A guest or gift author is someone who is listed as an author despite not qualifying for authorship. Guests are generally people brought in to make the list look more impressive (despite having little or no involvement with the research or publication). Gift authorship often involves mutual professional enhancement (ie, including colleagues on papers in return for being listed on theirs).



Signs that might indicate authorship problems

- Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments.
- Changes are made by somebody not on the author list (check Word document properties to see who made the changes but bear in mind there may be an innocent explanation for this, eg, using a shared computer, or a secretary making changes).
- 'Document properties' show the manuscript was drafted by someone not on the author list or properly acknowledged (but see above).
- Impossibly prolific author of review articles/opinion pieces (check also for redundant/overlapping publication; this may be detected by a **Medline** or **Google** search using the author's name).
- Several similar review articles/editorials/opinion pieces have been published under different author names (this may be detected by a **Medline** or **Google** search using the article title or key words).
- Role missing from list of contributors (eg, it appears that none of the named authors were responsible for analysing the data or drafting the paper).
- Unfeasibly long or short author list (eg, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author).
- Industry funded study with no authors from sponsor company (this may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted); reviewing the protocol may help determine the role of employees.^{1,2}

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COPE Council.
COPE Flowcharts
and infographics —
Full set — English.
[https://doi.org/
10.24318/cope.
2019.2.26](https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.26)

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AUTHORSHIP AND
CONTRIBUTORSHIP

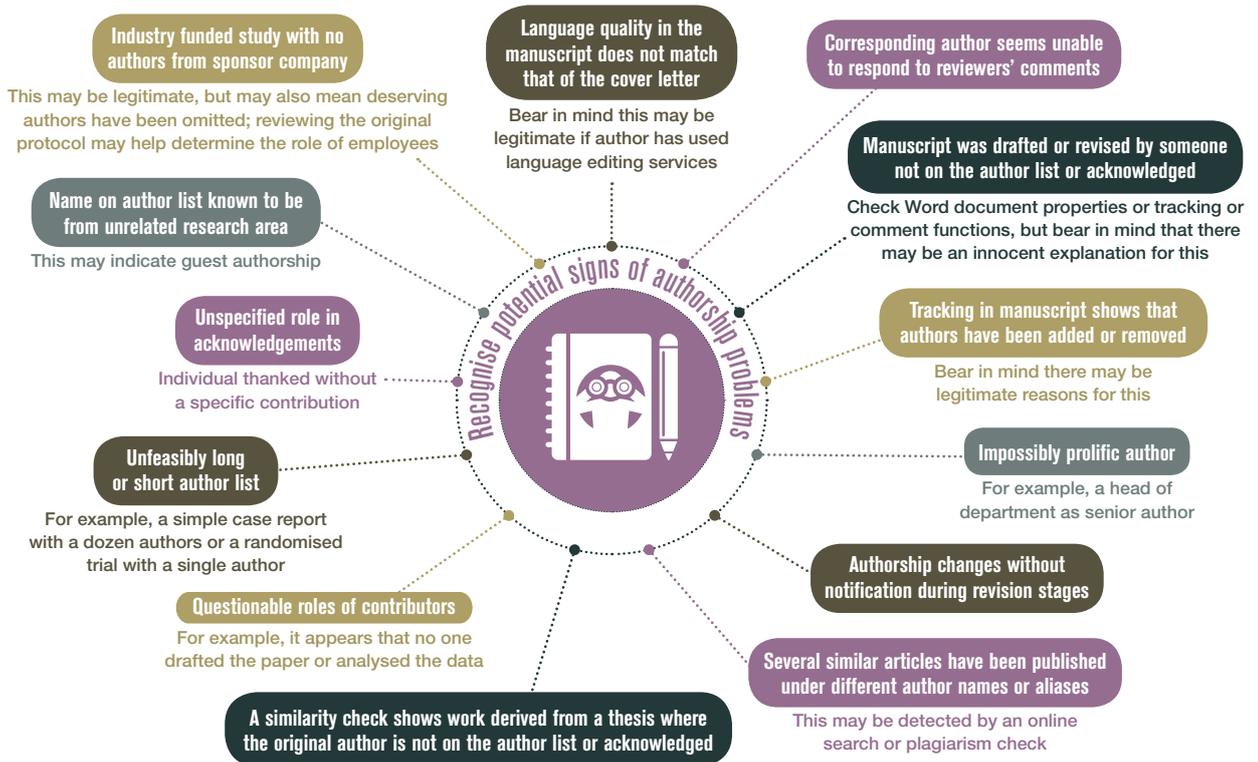
References

1. Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, *et al*. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. *PLoS Med* 2007;4:e19. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019>
2. Wager E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. *PLoS Med* 2007;4:e34. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034>

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Signs that might indicate authorship problems

HOW TO RECOGNISE POTENTIAL AUTHORSHIP PROBLEMS



Best practice to minimise authorship problems



Authorship policies:

Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship as well as processes for managing potential disputes.

For further details see: publicationethics.org/authorship

Relevant COPE Flowcharts and cases:

Flowchart: How to recognise potential authorship problems.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.22>

Flowchart: Suspected ghost, guest, or gift authorship.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.18>

Flowchart: Request for removal of author after publication.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.11>

Flowchart: Systematic manipulation of the publication process.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.23>

Case 17-15: Stolen article. <https://cope.onl/case-stolen>

Case 17-16: Authorship issues from disbanded consortium.

<https://cope.onl/case-authorship>

Case 17-14: Withdrawal request by an author.

<https://cope.onl/case-withdraw>

Further reading

COPE Discussion document on best practice in these publishing.

<https://doi.org/10.24318/LQU1h9US>

COPE webinar 2017: Standards in authorship.

<https://cope.onl/issues>

eLearning module on authorship (members only).

<https://cope.onl/elearn-author>

Siu-wai Leung. Promoting awareness of good authorship practice.

<https://cope.onl/good-practice>

Marušić A, Bošnjak L, Jerončić A, *et al.* A systematic review of research on the meaning, ethics and practices of authorship across scholarly disciplines. *PLoS ONE* 2011;6:e23477.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0023477>

Master Z, Bryn Williams-Jones B. Publication practices in multidisciplinary teams: a closer look at authorship assignment and ranking. <https://cope.onl/author-assign>

McNutt MK, Bradford M, Drazen JM, *et al.* Transparency in authors' contributions and responsibilities to promote integrity in scientific publication. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 2018;115:2557-60.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1715374115>

Götzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, *et al.* Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. *PLoS Med* 2007;4:e19.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019>

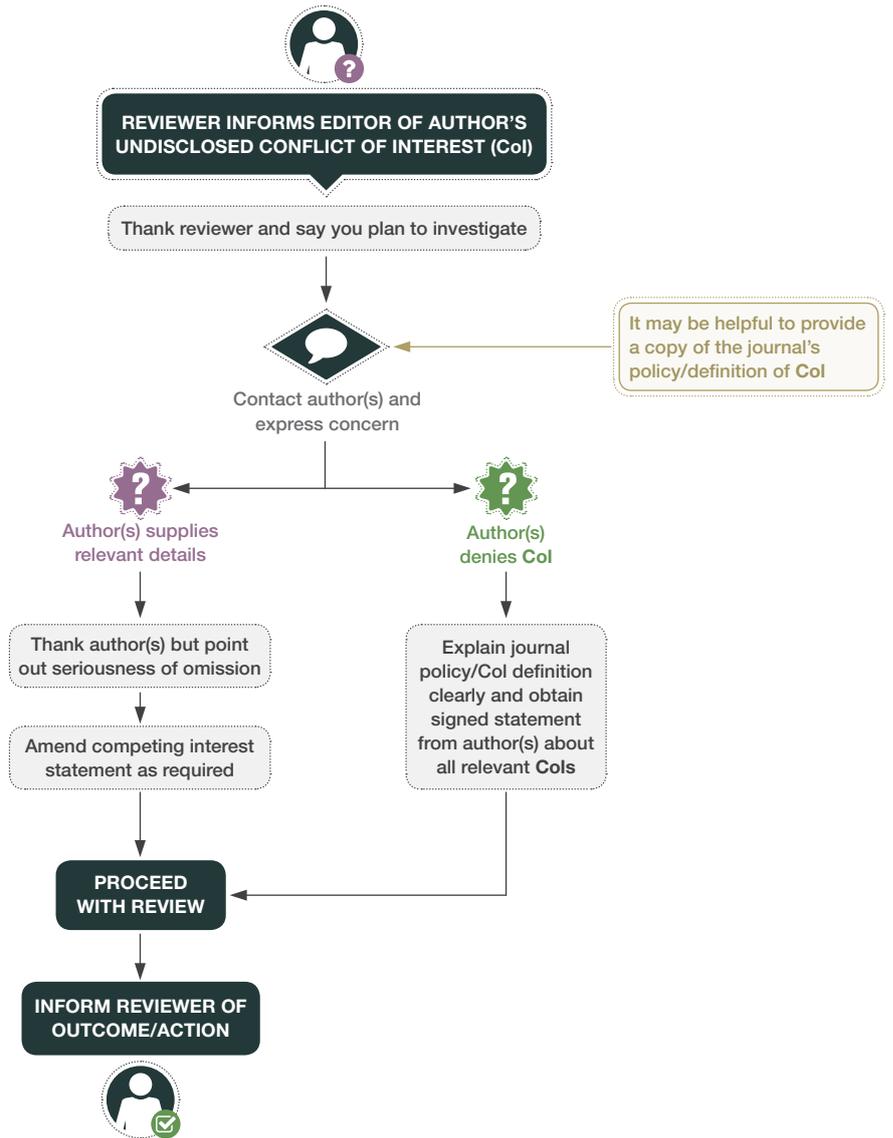
Wager E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. *PLoS Med* 2007;4:e34.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034>



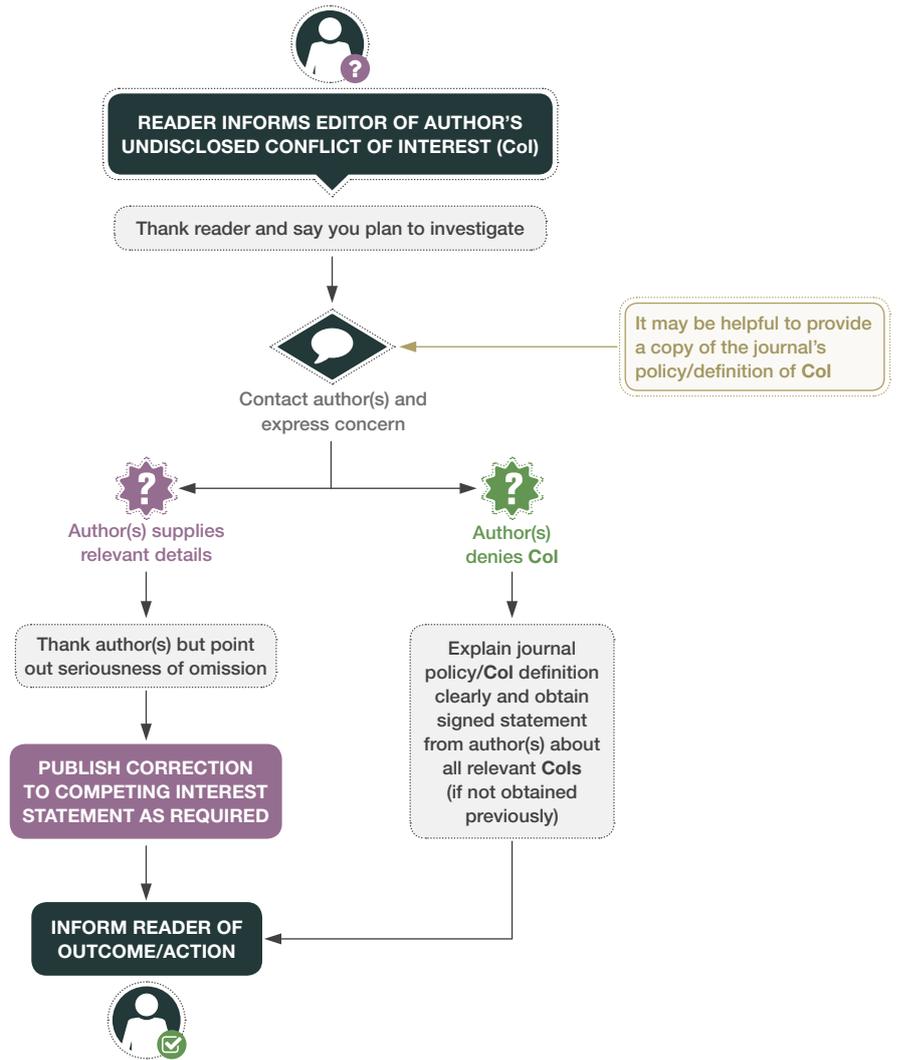
UNDISCLOSED CONFLICT OF INTEREST
IN A SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT

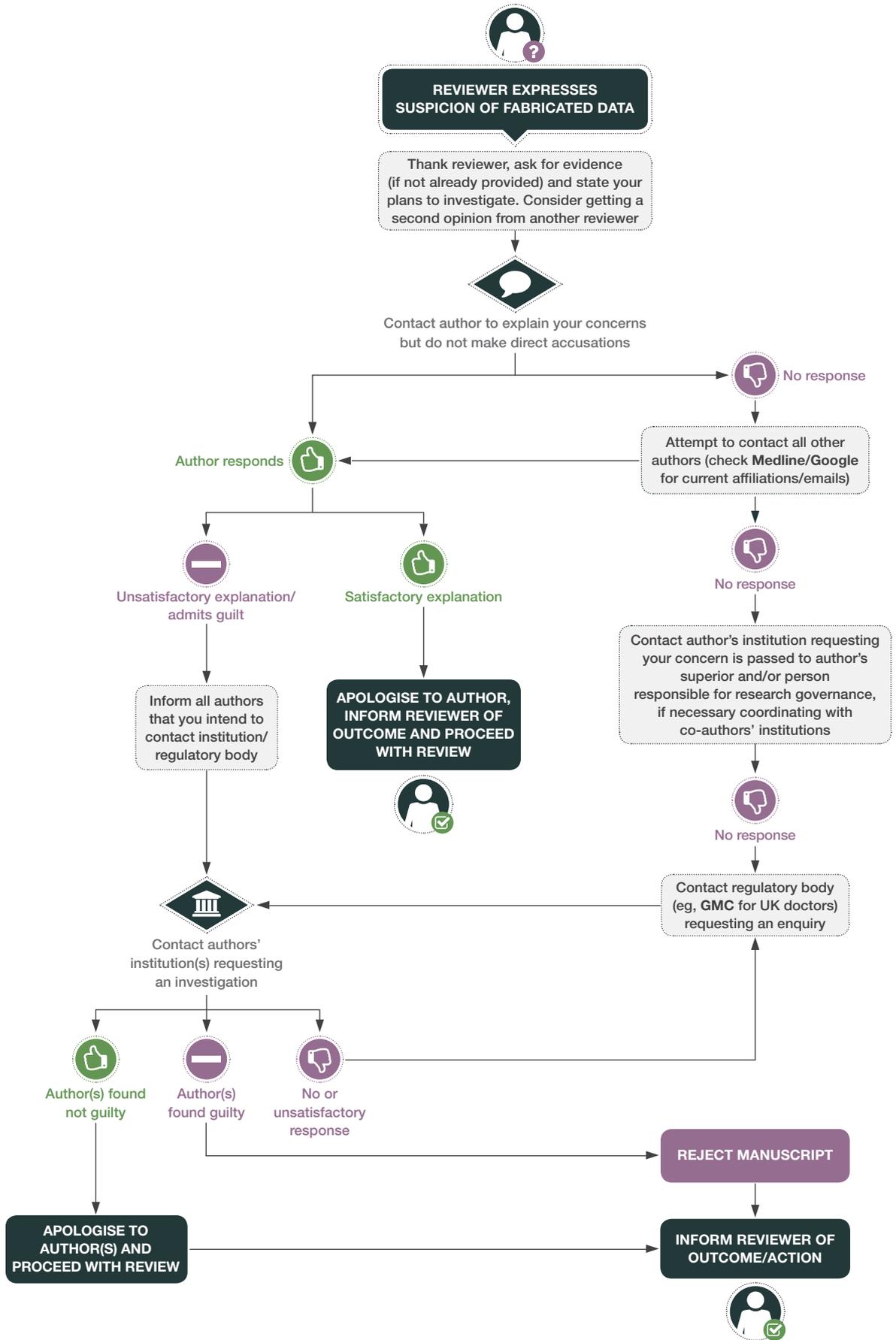
Note
To avoid future problems, always get signed statement of CoIs from all authors and reviewers before publication. Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of CoI.

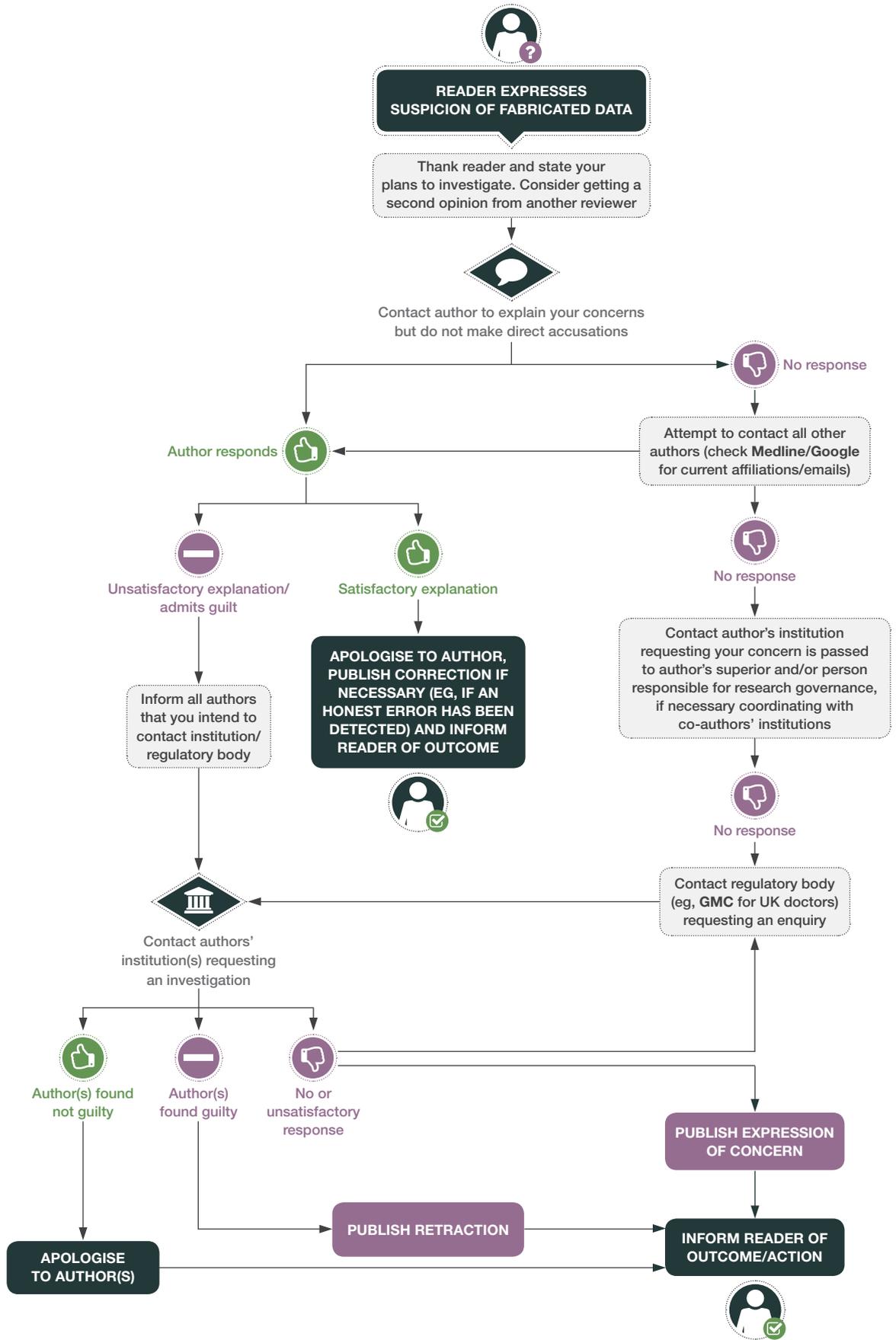


UNDISCLOSED CONFLICT OF INTEREST
IN A PUBLISHED ARTICLE

Note
To avoid future problems, always get signed statement of CoIs from all authors and reviewers before publication. Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of CoI.

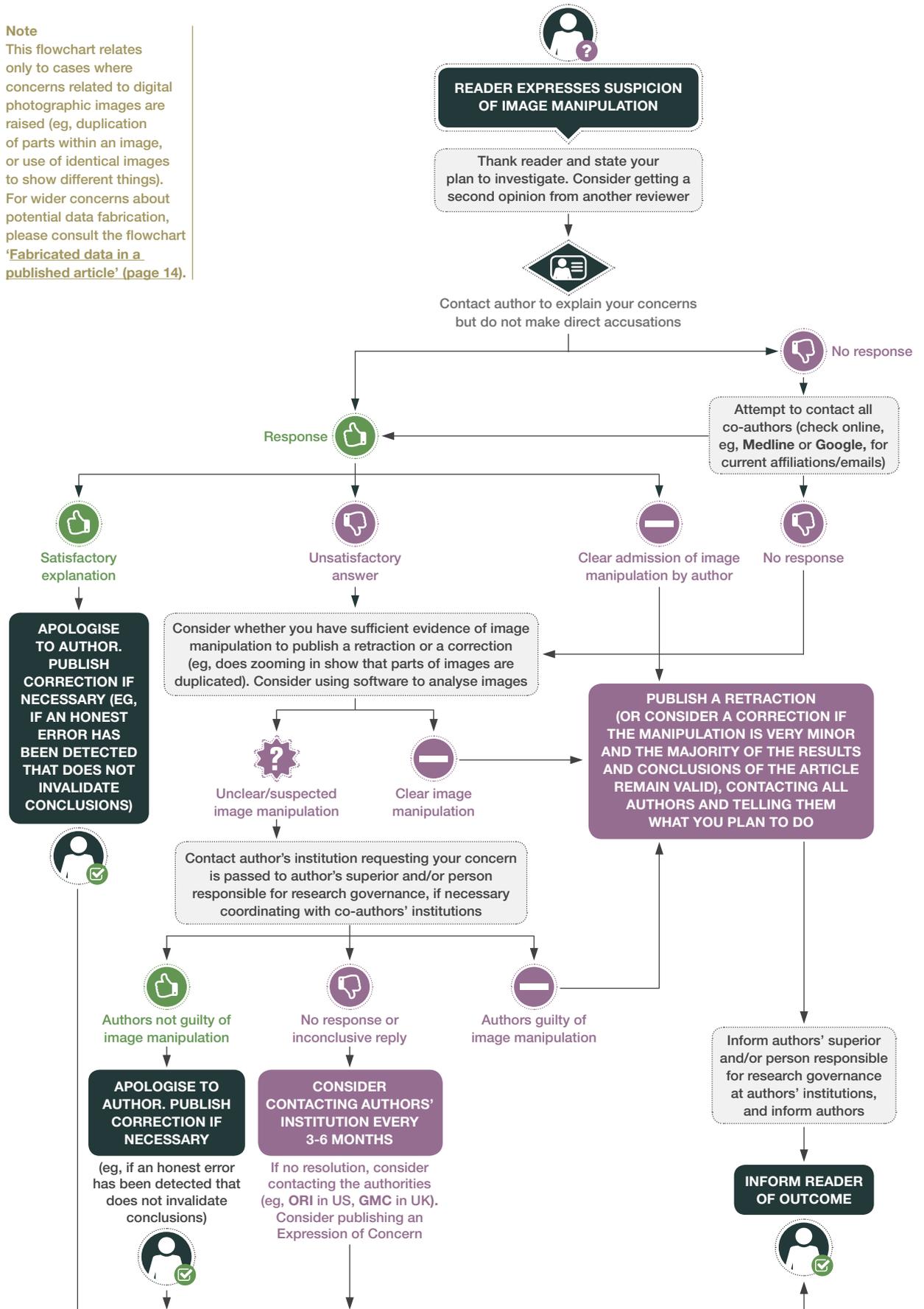






**IMAGE MANIPULATION
IN A PUBLISHED ARTICLE**

Note
This flowchart relates only to cases where concerns related to digital photographic images are raised (eg, duplication of parts within an image, or use of identical images to show different things). For wider concerns about potential data fabrication, please consult the flowchart 'Fabricated data in a published article' (page 14).



References

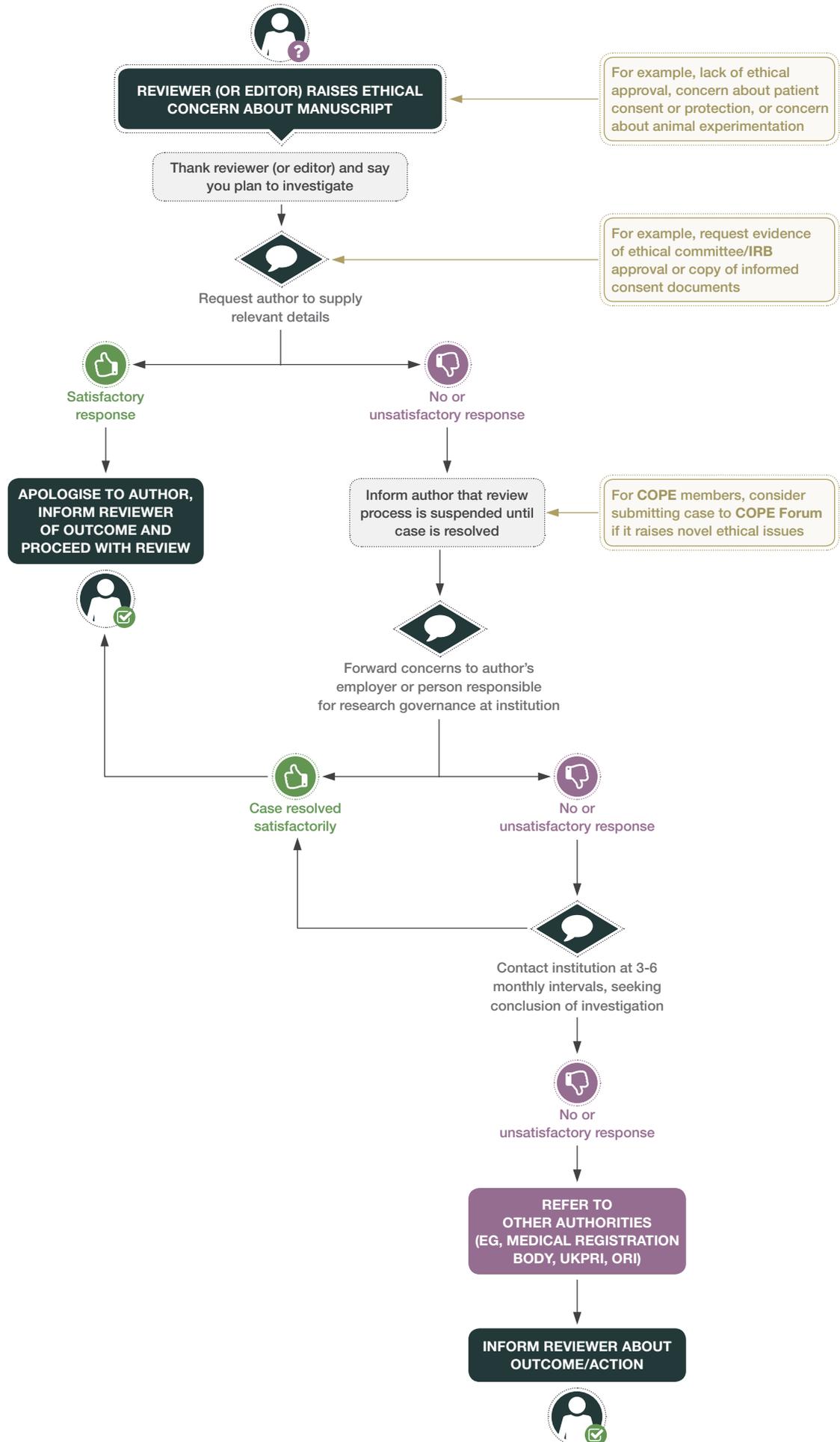
Journal of Cell Biology editorial policies on data integrity and plagiarism. <http://b.link/jcb-integrity>

Acuna DE, et al. Bioscience-scale automated detection of figure element reuse. bioRxiv February 23, 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1101/269415>

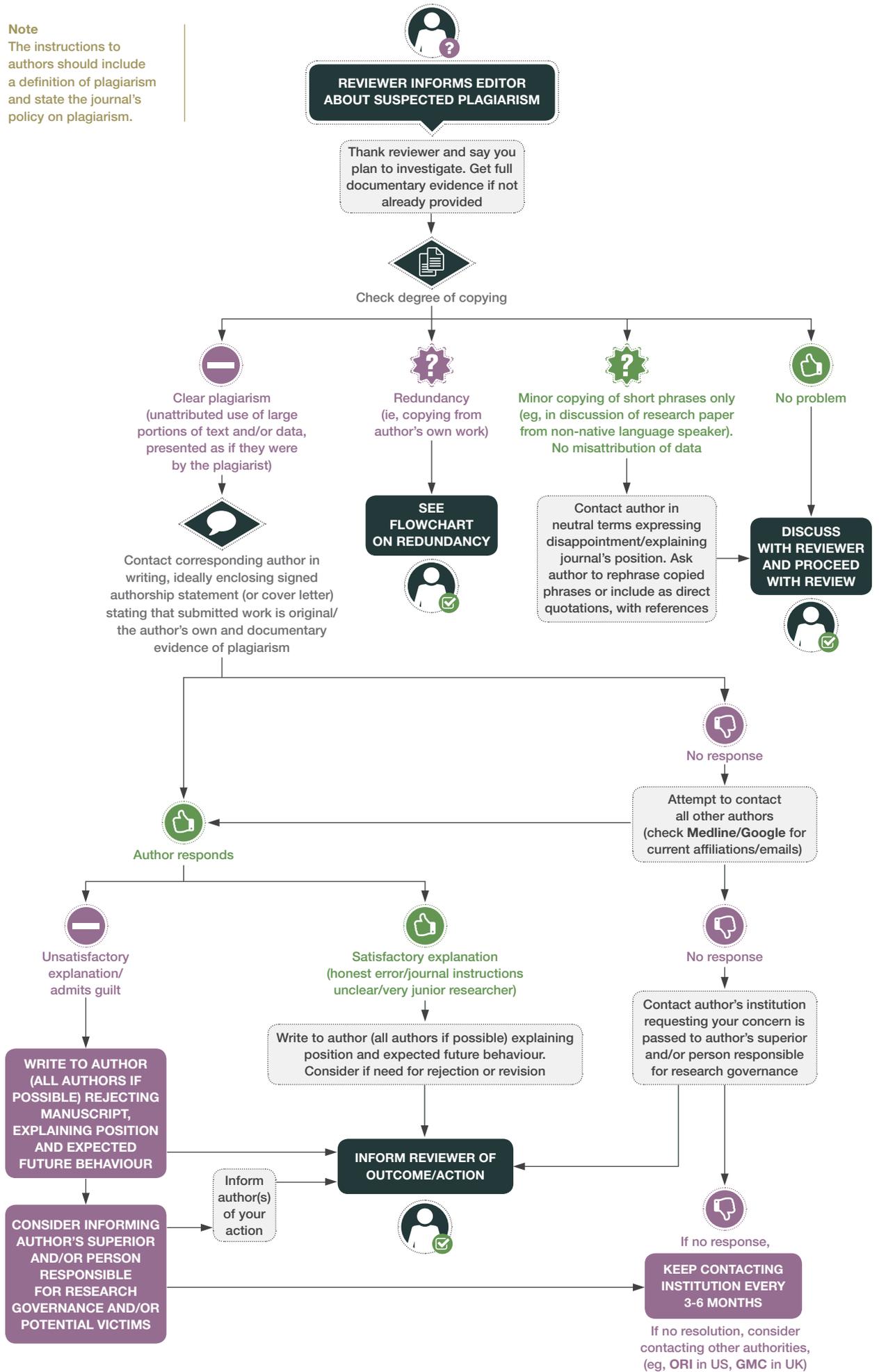
Butler D. Researchers have finally created a tool to spot duplicated images across thousands of papers. *Nature* 2018;555:18 <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-02421-3>

Goodchild van Hilten L. At Harvard, developing software to spot misused images in science. <http://b.link/elsevier-img>

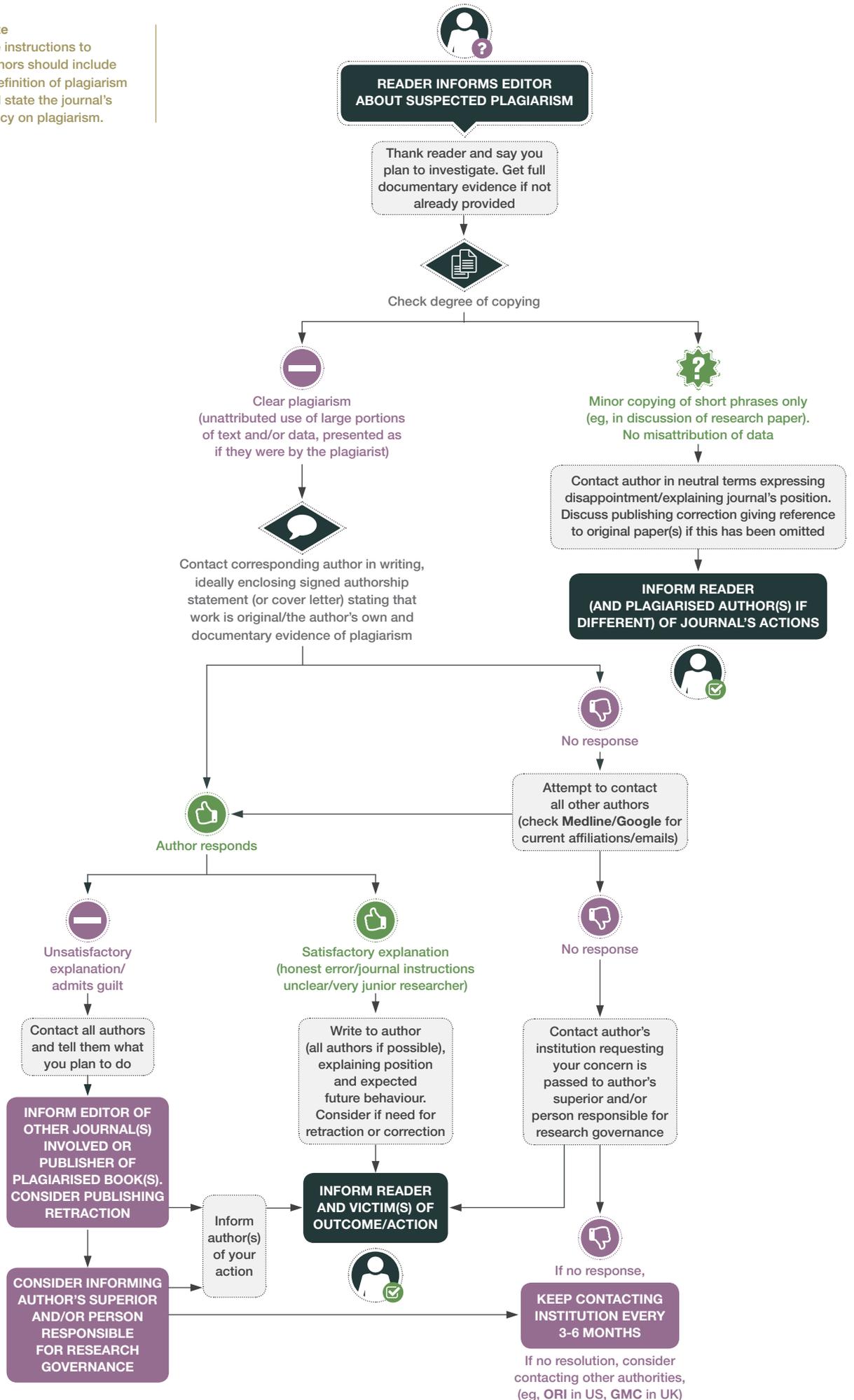
SUSPECTED ETHICAL PROBLEM
IN A SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT



Note
The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on plagiarism.



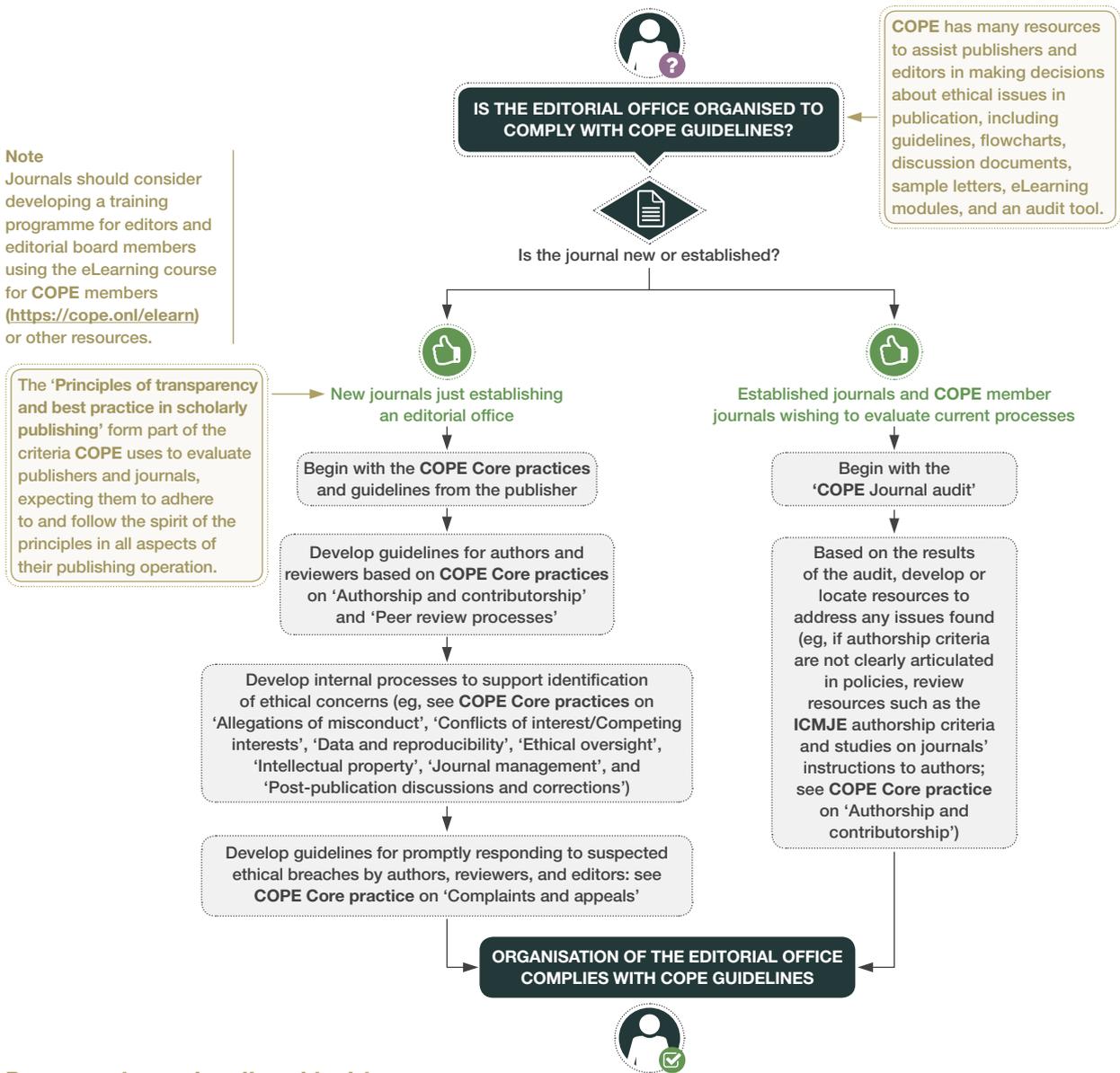
Note
The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal's policy on plagiarism.



Note
Journals should consider developing a training programme for editors and editorial board members using the eLearning course for COPE members (<https://cope.onl/elearn>) or other resources.

The 'Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing' form part of the criteria COPE uses to evaluate publishers and journals, expecting them to adhere to and follow the spirit of the principles in all aspects of their publishing operation.

COPE has many resources to assist publishers and editors in making decisions about ethical issues in publication, including guidelines, flowcharts, discussion documents, sample letters, eLearning modules, and an audit tool.



Best practice to handle ethical issues

Ethical issues are often complex and the approach will vary depending on the specific problem and the resources of the journal. In general, COPE expects that member journals will adhere to these three basic principles to resolve ethical issues and cases of alleged misconduct:



Journal guidelines and processes must be transparent

Provide links to COPE Guidelines, flowcharts, and other materials (eg, ICMJE authorship and conflict of interest guidelines)

These items will clearly inform authors, reviewers, and readers of the processes of submission, review, publication, and grievances



Systems must be in place to promptly attend to and resolve all complaints related to publication ethics

Clearly identify contact information for the person responsible for handling allegations of misconduct

Establish editorial office guidelines about who responds to complaints (eg, in what manner, within what time frame, and what parameters require involvement of legal staff and the publisher). Some journals have an ethics committee; others rely on a sole editor to handle these issues

Know when and how to liaise with other editors and institutions^{1,2}



Editorial staff must be committed to correcting the literature when needed and following through on requests from institutional investigations

Assure that resources such as COPE Retraction guidelines, flowcharts, and access to legal advice, if needed, are available to those tasked with resolving ethics issues

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COPE Flowcharts — Full set — English.
<https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.26>

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JOURNAL MANAGEMENT

Further reading

1. Yentis S, on behalf of COPE Council. Sharing of information among editors-in-chief regarding possible misconduct, version 1, March 2015. <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.7>
2. Wager E, Kleinert S, on behalf of COPE Council. Cooperation between research institutions and journals on research integrity cases: guidance from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), version 1, March 2012. <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2018.1.3>

Definition of systematic manipulation of the publication process

Systematic manipulation of the publication process is where an individual or a group of individuals have repeatedly used dishonest or fraudulent practices to:

- prevent or inappropriately influence the independent assessment of a piece of scholarly work by an independent peer.
- inappropriately attribute authorship of a piece of scholarly work.
- publish fabricated or plagiarised research.

Systematic manipulation is conducted with the goal of influencing the publication record and/or achieving financial gain, and involves more than one manuscript and possibly more than one journal.

Systematic manipulation of the publication process may raise concerns at different levels:

- **Peer review manipulation.** This type of manipulation can occur directly by manipulation or hacking of the submission system of the journal. It can also occur when authors are able to suggest peer reviewers and input contact email addresses for these peer reviewers on the submission system of the journal. The authors may suggest fabricated names or names of real experts, but the contact email addresses are falsified so that all correspondence with the suggested peer reviewers is directed back to the authors. The manipulators then submit positive peer review reports to ensure the manuscript is accepted for publication.

This type of manipulation may be carried out by a group of individuals who agree to act as false peer reviewers for each other's manuscripts, thereby guaranteeing favourable peer review reports and boosting the publication records of the group.

Third party editing agencies may carry out this type of manipulation by suggesting peer reviewers on the authors' behalf, for a fee, but supplying fabricated email addresses that they input on the submission system of the journal (although not necessarily with the authors' knowledge). They then also supply the favourable reviews, thereby guaranteeing manuscript acceptance for which they can charge a fee (Fig 1).

- **Authorship for sale/papermills.** Another possibility is initially inserting the name of an accomplished guest author, especially for single-blind and open review, and then replacing the name during revision or after editorial acceptance (Fig 2).
- **Substitution of a manuscript.** Sometimes a high quality manuscript is initially submitted (to ensure it passes peer review) and then a similar, but poorer quality manuscript (the authors' own manuscript) is substituted after editorial acceptance.

Fig 1. An example of peer review manipulation

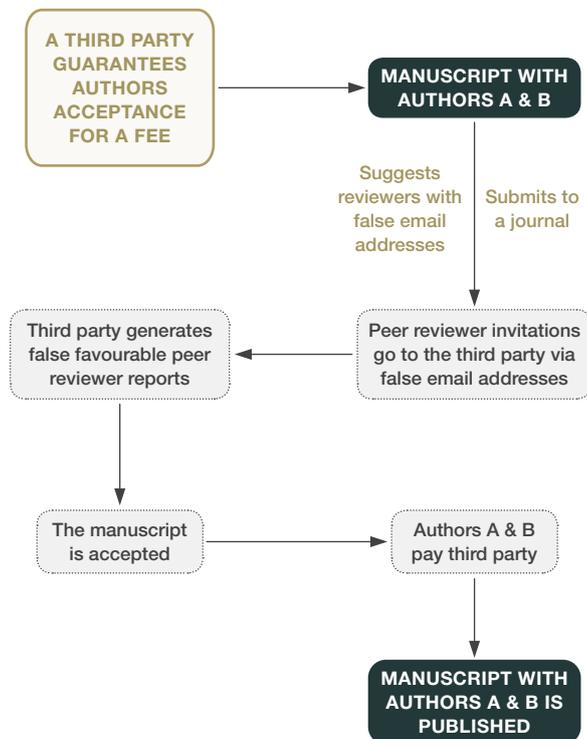
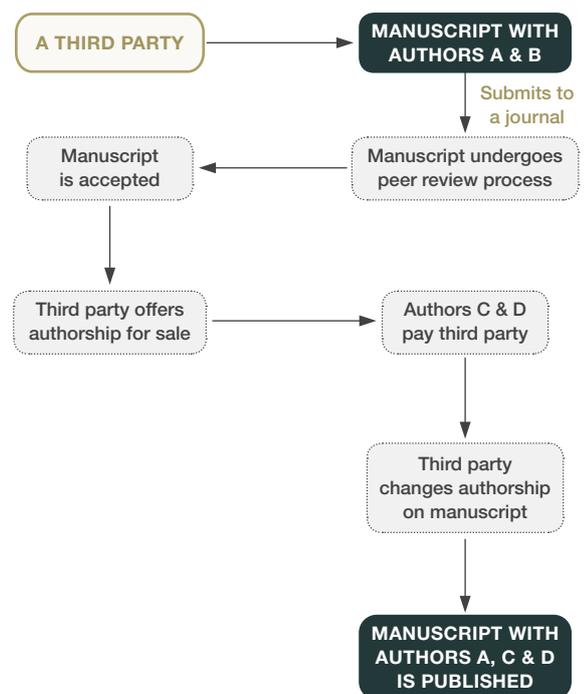


Fig 2. An example of authorship for sale



Note: Peer review manipulation may occur in isolation and be instigated by authors on a small scale, for example, if a group of individuals are trying to boost their own publication records. Authorship for sale is likely to be accompanied by peer review manipulation because claiming a fee from the authors is dependent on acceptance for publication.

**SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION OF
THE PUBLICATION PROCESS**

Possible signs of systematic manipulation of the publication process



How to investigate and prevent further publication manipulation

On discovering a suspicious pattern, the first considerations would be:

- To determine the cause of the problem – is it the authors, is it the reviewers?
 - Search for other submissions and publications by the same authors.
 - Check the peer reviewers of the suspicious manuscripts and published articles.
 - Check the email addresses of peer reviewers of suspicious manuscripts and articles.
 - Check whether there have been requests to change authorship or make major revisions after editorial acceptance.
- To determine whether there is a weakness in your submission process or manuscript handling system that can be addressed to prevent further manipulation.

Further investigation might include:

- Searching for computer IP addresses to determine whether all manuscripts were submitted via the same location.
- Cross publisher pattern checking via the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- Seeking advice from COPE.

Prevention steps may include the following:

- Using technology, such as adding flags to manuscripts or running searches on suspicious names or emails across all journals might make patterns become apparent.
- Providing information and training for editors to raise awareness of the types of manipulation that are occurring and what to look out for would be useful

COPE Publishers' Forum

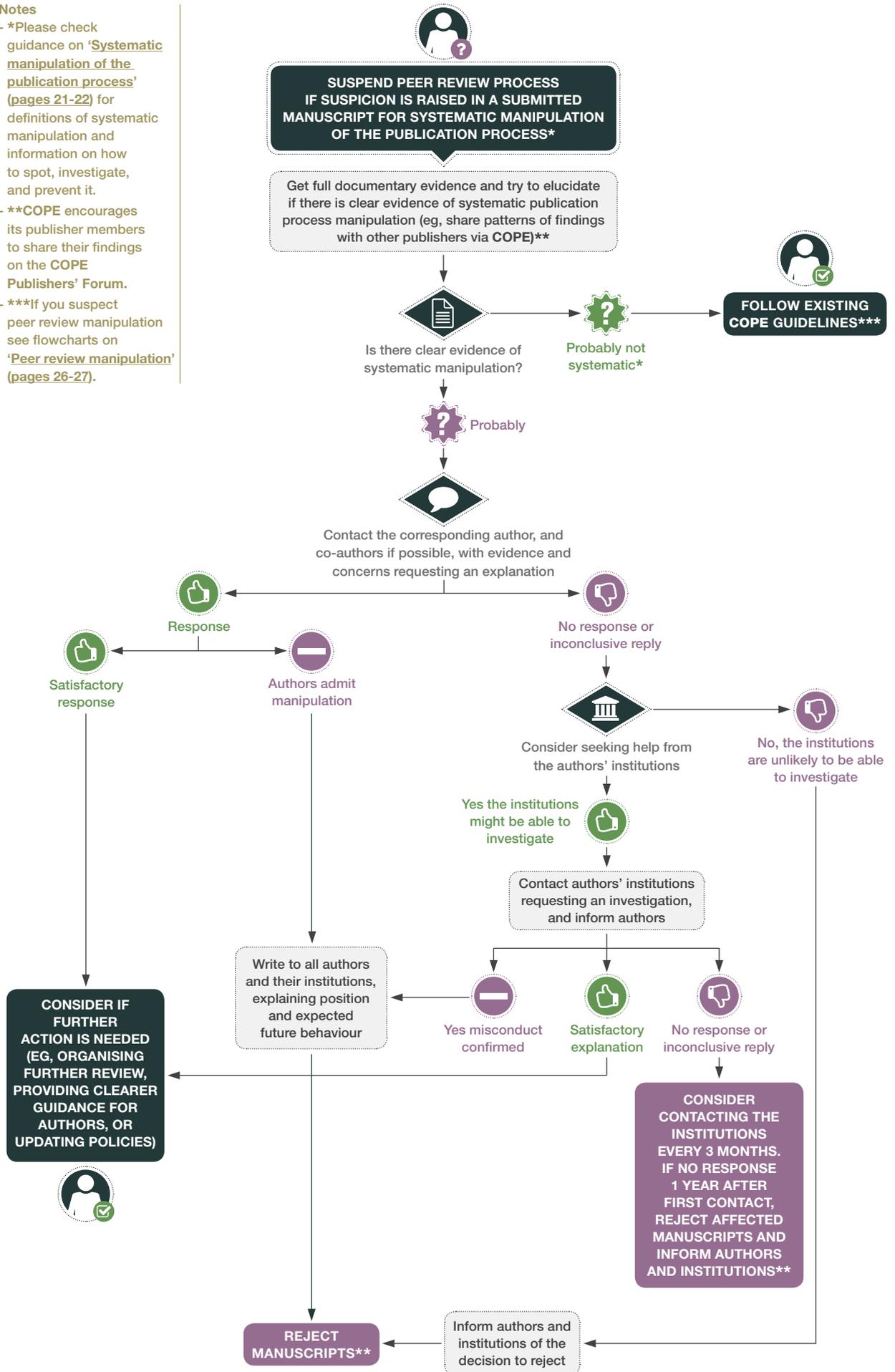
The COPE Publishers' Forum is already used by publisher members of COPE to seek advice on unusual cases. It provides a confidential means of sharing information, such as patterns of behaviour, about publication process manipulation with other publishers to allow them to look for similar patterns in their systems. Over time, these shared patterns and findings could develop into a resource that all members could use to help with their investigations into suspicious activities.



SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS
SUSPECTED BEFORE PUBLICATION

Notes

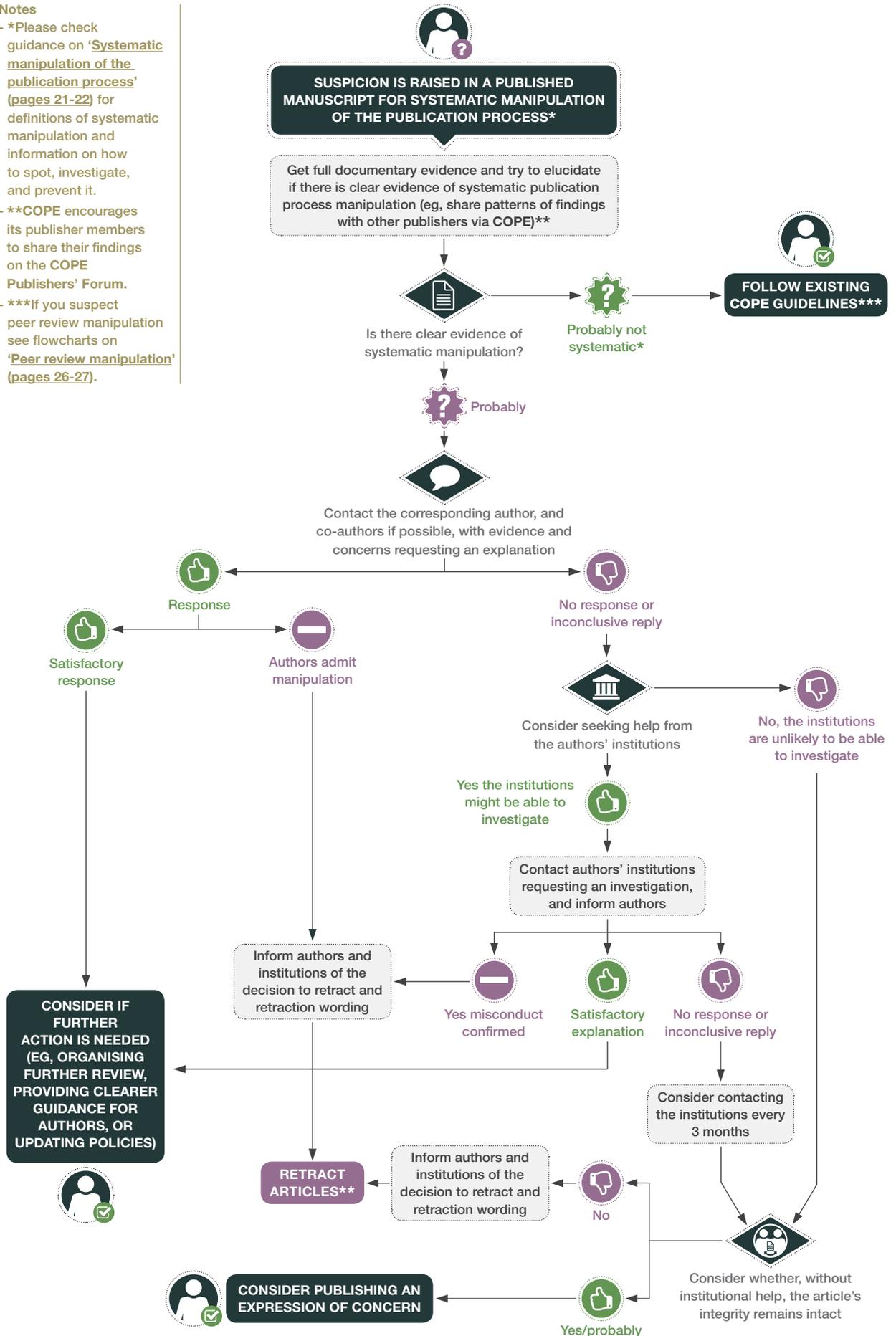
- *Please check guidance on **'Systematic manipulation of the publication process'** (pages 21-22) for definitions of systematic manipulation and information on how to spot, investigate, and prevent it.
- **COPE encourages its publisher members to share their findings on the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- ***If you suspect peer review manipulation see flowcharts on **'Peer review manipulation'** (pages 26-27).



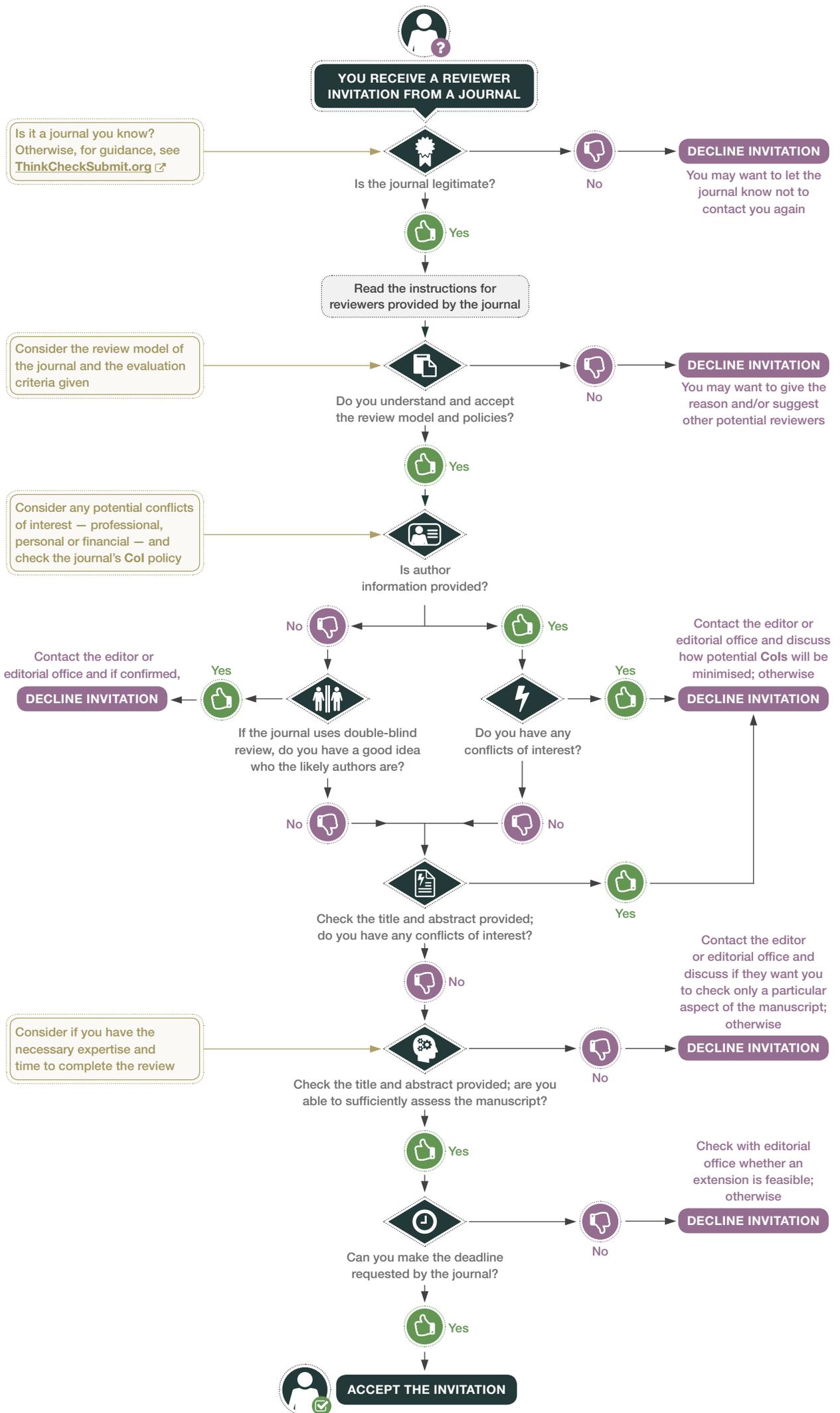
SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS
SUSPECTED AFTER PUBLICATION

Notes

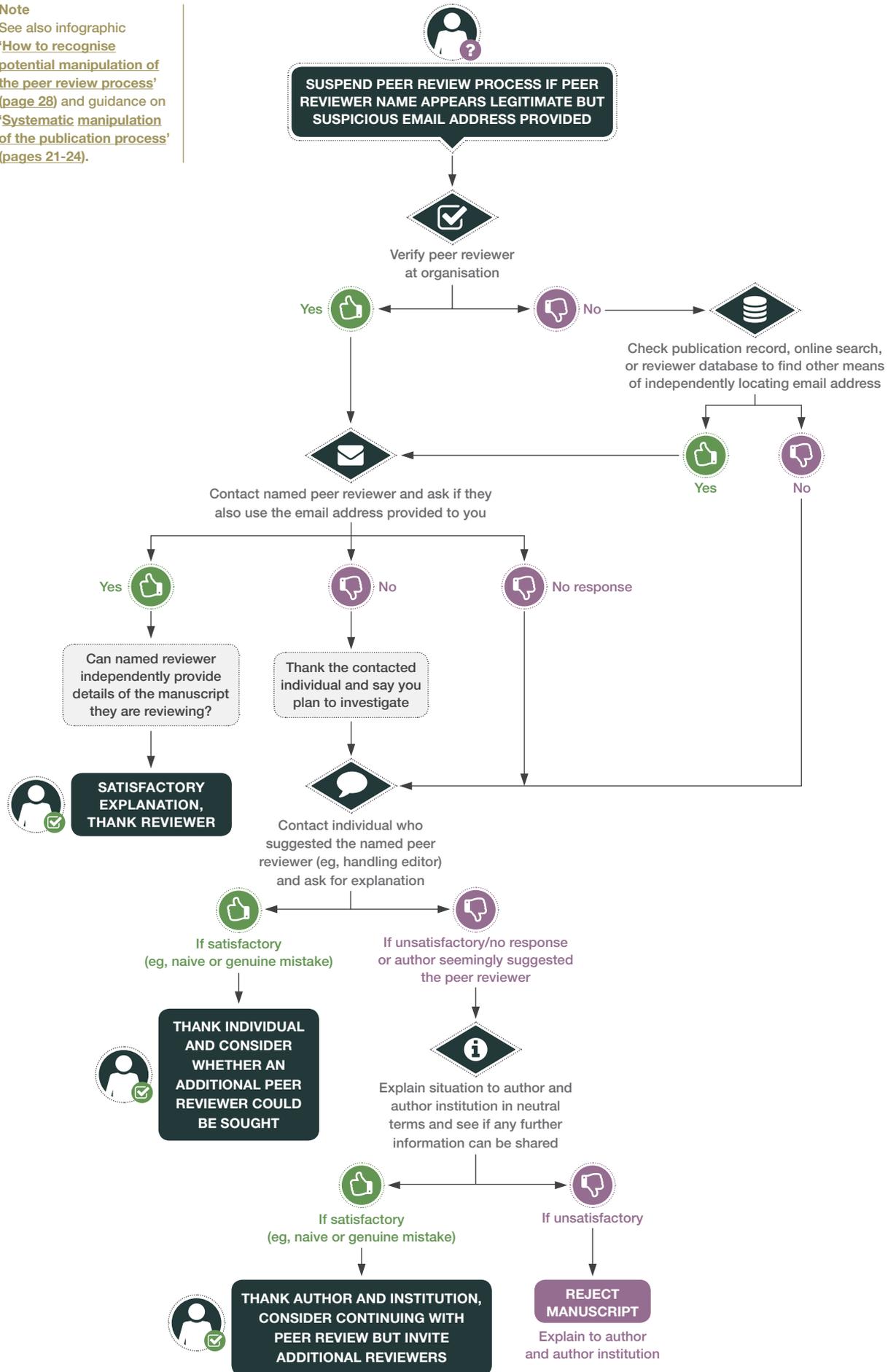
- *Please check guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-22) for definitions of systematic manipulation and information on how to spot, investigate, and prevent it.
- **COPE encourages its publisher members to share their findings on the COPE Publishers' Forum.
- ***If you suspect peer review manipulation see flowcharts on 'Peer review manipulation' (pages 26-27).



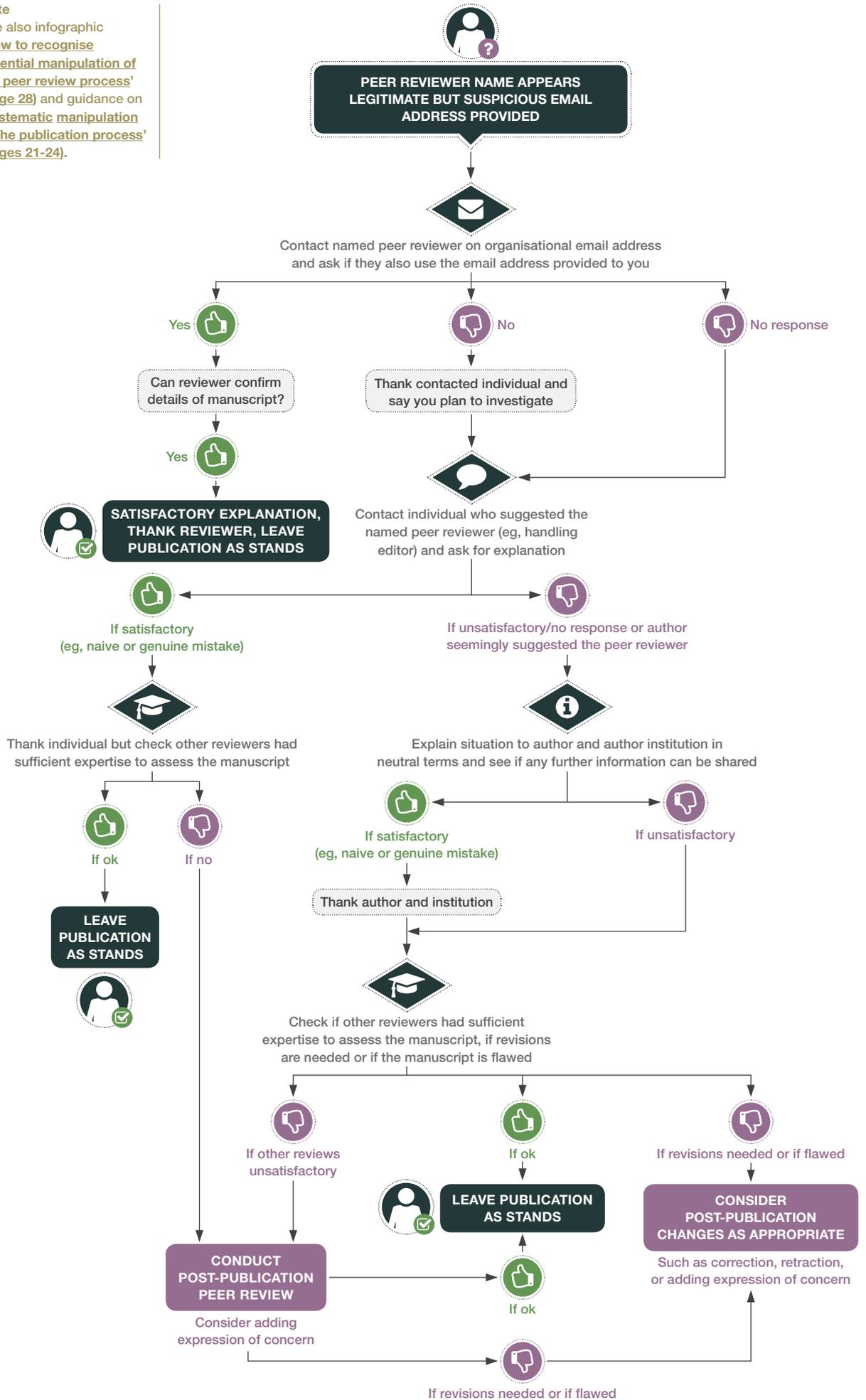
WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN ASKED TO PEER REVIEW A MANUSCRIPT

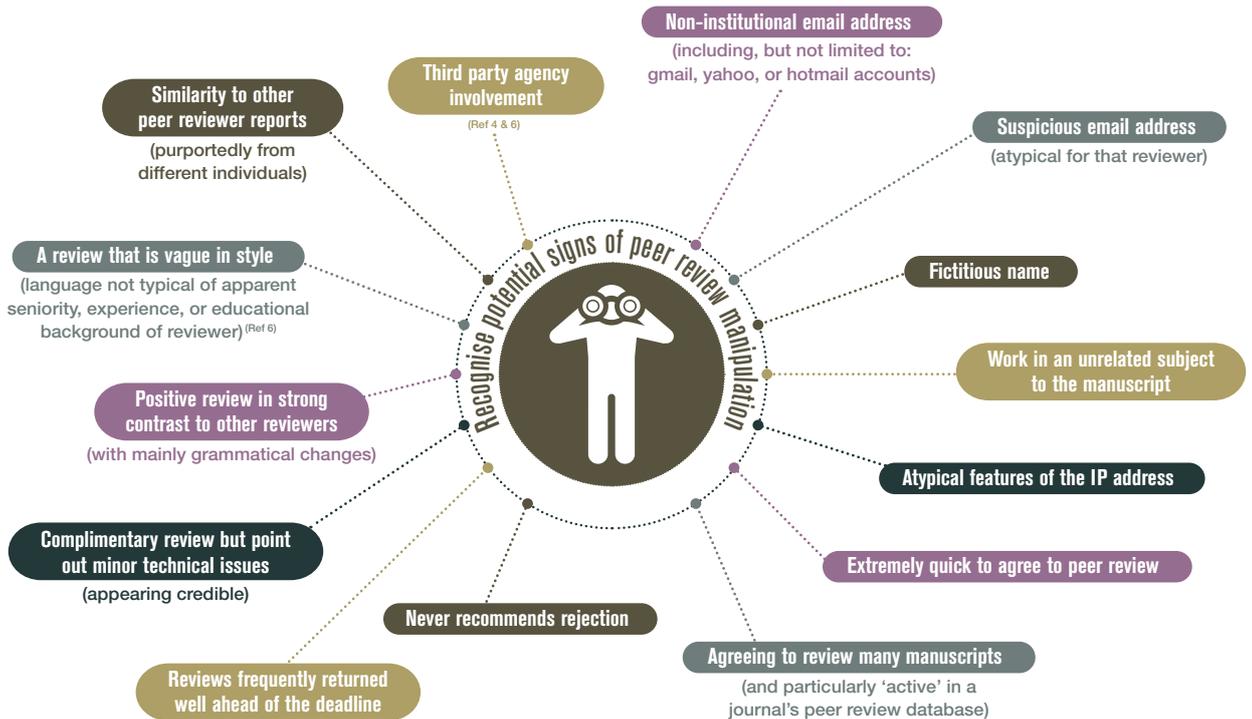


Note
See also infographic 'How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process' (page 28) and guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-24).

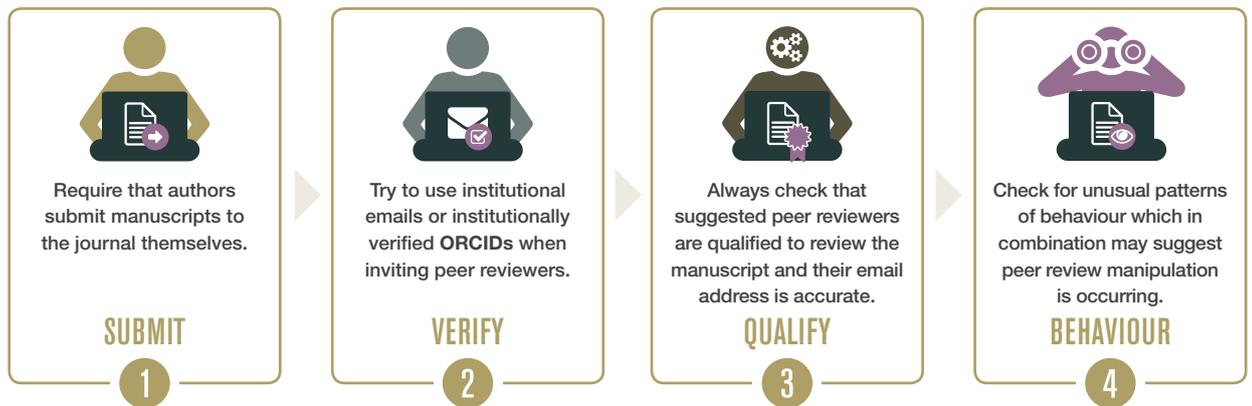


Note
See also infographic 'How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process' (page 28) and guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' (pages 21-24).





Best practice to minimise peer review manipulation



Peer reviewers may be suggested by:

- the Editor handling the manuscript.
- authors on submission of their manuscript to a journal.
- another reviewer who is unable to peer review the manuscript.

While there is an expectation that everyone involved in the process acts with integrity,¹ the peer review process can be susceptible to manipulation,²⁻⁴ as discussed at COPE's 2016 North American Seminar.⁵

The features or patterns of activity shown opposite are suggested to help editors recognise potential signs of peer review manipulation. Often it is the occurrence of these features in combination that may indicate a potential issue, and they may only become apparent at later stages in the peer review or publishing process.

Relevant COPE cases:

- Case 11-27: Author creates bogus email accounts for proposed reviewers. <https://cope.onl/bogus-email>
- Case 12-12: Compromised peer review system in published papers. <https://cope.onl/case-review>
- Case 12-16: Compromised peer review (unpublished). <https://cope.onl/compromised>

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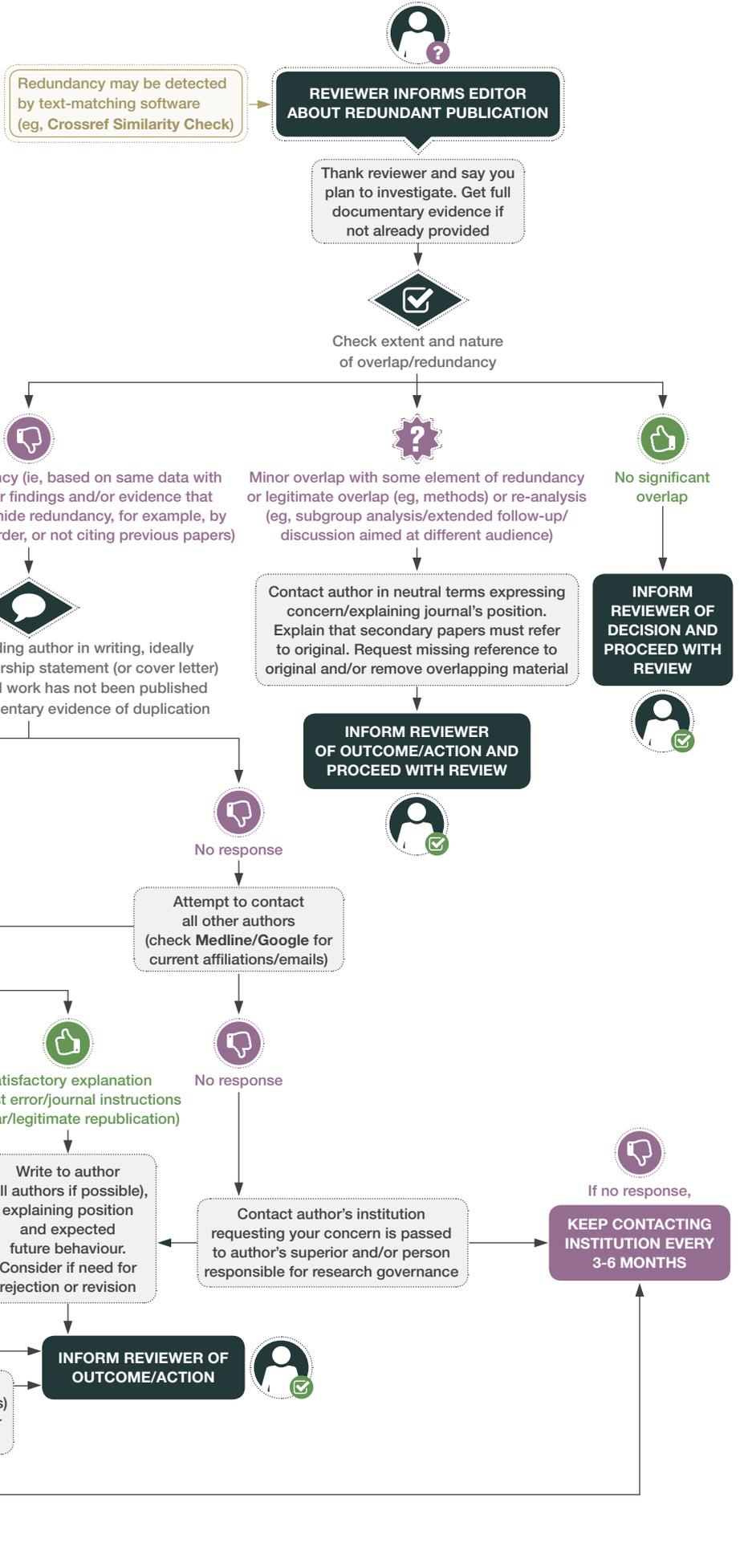
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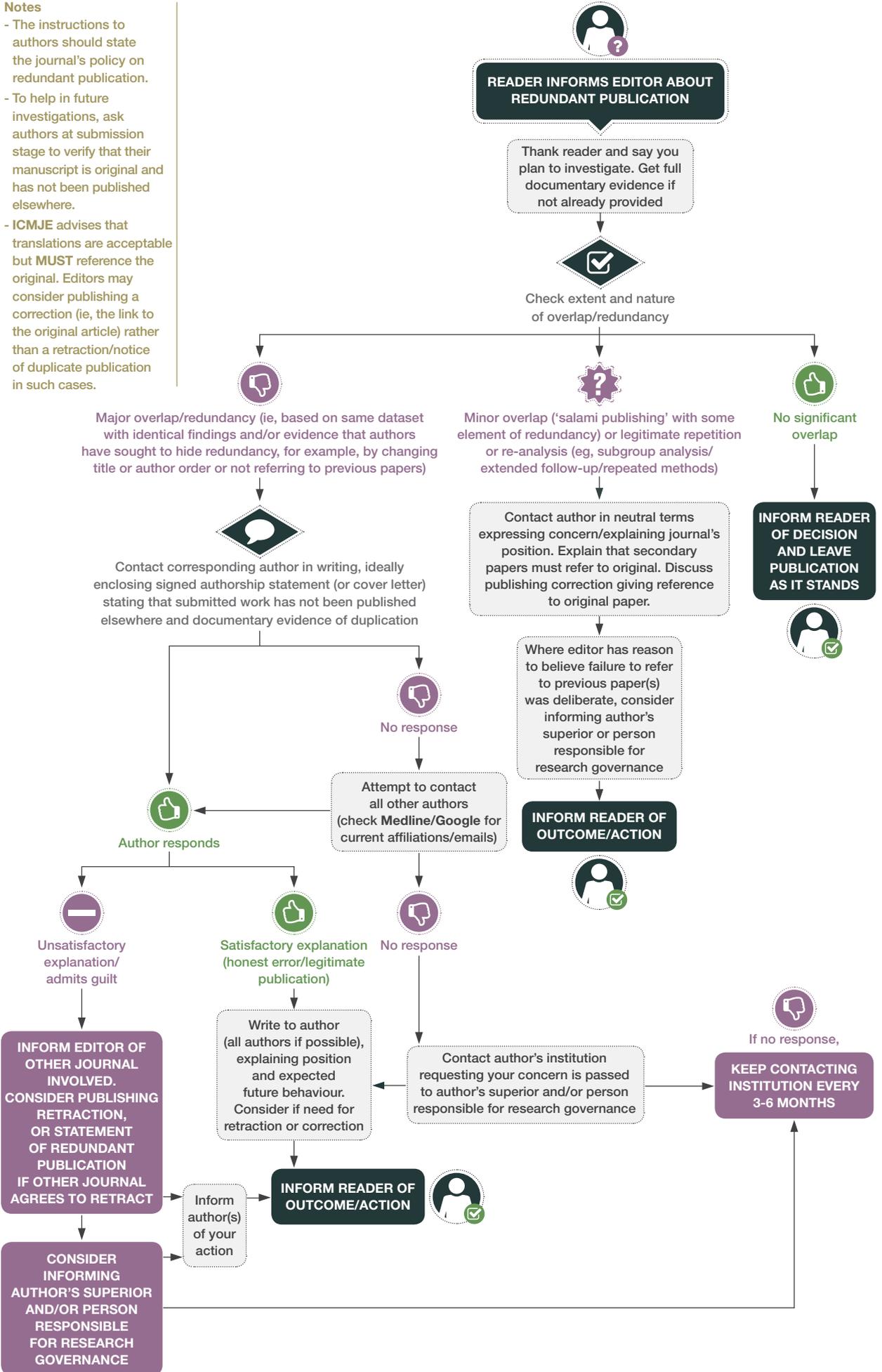
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