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The scientific merit assessment in Social Sciences & Humanities

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“Merit” & “Transparency” principles

➔moral, ethical connotation (deals with conduct)

➔values that tend to denote the idea of an obviousness of their signification

➔ in fact : not a mere ethical issue

➔ but : governance/management principles that should be discussed as such, i.e. political issues that shape the life of universities and scientific communities

Merit & Transparency principles in HR Strategies

➔Open competition-based logic in recruitment

➔ Fairness / equity

➔Require specific tools to be implemented :

- strong, reliable & public procedures
- standardised research assessment or evaluation

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Scientific merit assessment demands standardised research evaluation, measuring tools (shared frame of reference)

(many reasons such as : the need for efficiency in a context of ever-growing evaluation workload, the will of academic & research institutions to position themselves in international competitive environments)

But, in turn,

Standardized research evaluation tends to standardise scientific merit & thus to shape the production of knowledge

As researchers are themselves evaluators / assessors (extended principle of peer-reviewing)

➔*Defining what « valuable » knowledge and « good » scientific contribution are*

➔*is our collective responsibility*

Not merely objectified thanks to ready-made bibliometric instruments or to all-purpose recipe !

Such responsibility means :

- careful attention to the concrete implications of our task (what is at stake ?)
- good knowledge and responsible use of our evaluation tools (powers and limits ; what can they measure ?)
- open spaces for discussion & disputation about our tools (criteria and standards)
- reliable evaluation whose objectivity depends on our capacity to build a collective judgement attuned to the specificity of the situation

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LIÈGE université

Research Council in Humanities and Social Sciences

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A collective & pluridisciplinary inquiry into our evaluation standards and criteria

➔plurality and diversity of disciplines, methodologies and epistemological paradigms

➔what can we learn from each other ?

➔what do we value ? what do we stand for ?

➔how to make « excellence » a meaningful objective, and not a watchword ?

Research outcomes (production)

3 different types to be distinguished and valued differently /aspects of « merit »

➔ Scientific research publications (in the strict sense) of the term

*all works contributing to the advancement of knowledge, aimed at scholars and scientific communities and that are submitted to a scholarly **peer-review** validation process prior to its publication (with a significant probability of rejection or correction)*

➔ Expert works and papers

works aimed at professional or specialized publics (for instance public or government services), showing the social relevance and use value of the research, outside the scientific communities

➔ Extension work and public dissemination

written and oral communications aimed at a general audience(extended sharing)

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How to evaluate scientific publication in the strict sense ? The « quality » issue

➔ 2 distinct modes of objectivation of value (quanti/quali)

➔ 3 types of evaluation **to combine** :

- **Quantitative (by bibliometric indicators, extrinsic)**
- **Qualitative A (by non-bibliometric indicators, extrinsic)**
- **Qualitative B (by analysis of intrinsic quality)**

How to evaluate scientific publication in the strict sense ? The « quality » issue

Quantitative evaluation (by bibliometric indicators)

Counting either simple or proportioned (h-index, Impact Factor)

What they *indicate* : extrinsic qualities such as visibility, influence, renown

Do not necessary reflect the intrinsic quality of scientific work

➔ limited instruments that are now known to do worse than better if not associated with other assessment methods

➔ special case : journal rankings (we promote joint initiatives for alternative rankings in certain disciplines)

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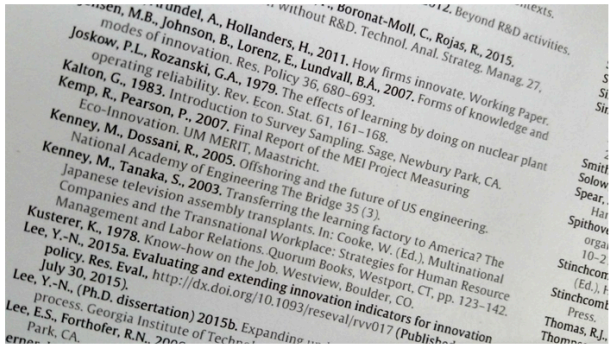

Citation lists are key to calculating journal impact factors. David Malakoff

Hate journal impact factors? New study gives you one more reason

By John Bohannon | Jul. 6, 2016 , 4:30 PM

Scientists have a love-hate relationship with the journal impact factor (JIF), the measurement used to rank technical journals by prestige. They have come to use it not only for deciding where to submit research papers, but for judging their peers, as well as influencing who wins jobs, tenure, and grants. All that from a single, easy to read number.

And yet a journal's impact factor is dismissed by many as useless or even destructive to the scientific community. In an attempt to shed some light, a group of researchers and journal editors today released a data set and analysis of the citation counts used to calculate this magical number. And their conclusions are likely to delight critics of the metric.

How to evaluate scientific publication in the strict sense ? The « quality » issue

Qualitative A (by non-bibliometric indicators, but still extrinsic indicators of the quality)

- Standard peer-reviewing (free submission, anonymous reviewing with significant probability of rejection or revision)
- Non standard (but classical in the H & SS) peer-review procedures (to be explained by the applicant)
- Other extrinsic indicators such as the scientific reputation of the publisher, the editor, reviews and recensions, citations, international scope

➔ Grab as much information as possible and give the applicant the possibility to explain

➔ Do not neglect minor subjects, niche knowledge, local objects, and other languages (do not systematically favour mainstream research)

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How to evaluate scientific publication in the strict sense ? The « quality » issue

Qualitative B (by analysis of intrinsic quality)

How can we overcome the limits of extrinsic quality assessment and ensure reliable judgements ?

- Extension of the peer-reviewing process
- Reading of scientific publications

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Qualitative B (by analysis of intrinsic quality) : Criteria ?

Theory : good information, solidity of conceptual background, originality, relevance of the question and/or of hypotheses, quality of results interpretation, possible paradigmatic innovation, etc

Methodology : suitability as to the object of investigation, clarity and intelligibility of the method, quality of the data collection and if relevant, reproductibility, originality

Formal aspects : quality of writing and/or communication

Plea

Evaluation serving research (and not a research serving evaluation)

Evaluation that supports quality (sustainable research, slow down)

Connected with the reality of diverse knowledge practices

Thank you !