Optimizing the responsible researcher: towards fair and constructive academic advancement

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Researchers are pulled in various, sometimes contradictory directions by the multiplication of performance metrics and new incentives to align with societal needs. Management structures, funding systems, and publication practices are increasingly influenced by pressures to promote only the highest quality science, and by models and incentives for academic advancement that would produce this highest quality. However, it is highly questionable whether a scientific practice controlled through these mechanisms in fact selects (and to some extent breeds) scientists who comply with ideals of responsible conduct in research.

Recent years have seen high-profile initiatives to improve current criteria for assessing academic achievements (e.g. the Leiden Manifesto, the Metric Tide, Science in Transition, DORA, METRICS, Reward Alliance). Some institutions are implementing improved and innovative incentive and reward systems. It is yet unknown whether these systems will counter unintended effects of evaluation systems and unwarranted uses of performance metrics, and help to foster responsible conduct of research by selecting the scientists with a multidimensional profile (i.e. more than a good publication and citation record) and a skill-set that enables them to undertake and supervise both innovative and societally relevant research. In this talk I will discuss preliminary findings from a project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Health Research and Development, in which we describe the optimal profile of researchers in terms of their propensity to foster responsible conduct in research, and compare this profile with existing academic incentive and reward systems. The project will result in an evidence-based framework and a set of concrete policy recommendations for designing (or adapting) academic reward systems aimed at fostering excellent, socially responsible research.

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