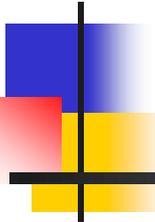


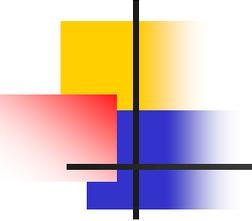
Academic excellence through scholarly research and publications:



A multi-stakeholder perspective

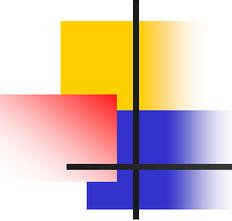
Calin GURAU
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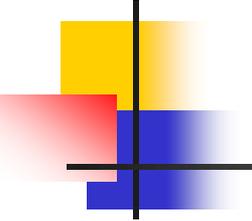
Academic excellence

- An imperative for most higher education organizations in today's highly competitive and globalized environment.
- The paradox of the world-class university is that everyone wants one, no one knows what it is, and no one knows how to get one (Altbach, 2004).
- Lack of rigorous measures.
- Ranking system: national, international, global.
- The dynamic imbrication of pedagogy, academic research and community participation.



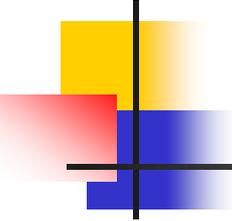
International accreditations for business schools

- **AACSB** accreditation recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a focus on excellence in all areas, including teaching, research, curriculum development, and student learning” (Stephanie M. Bryant, executive vice president and chief accreditation officer of AACSB International).
- **EQUIS** accreditation ensures a rigorous quality control, benchmarking your school against international standards in terms of governance, programmes, students, faculty, research, internationalisation, ethics, responsibility and sustainability, as well as engagement with the world of practice.



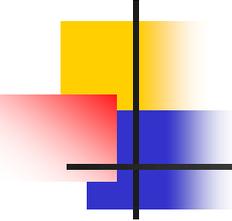
Binswanger M. (2014). Excellence by Nonsense: The Competition for Publications in Modern Science. In: Bartling S., Friesike S. (Eds.), Opening Science. Springer, Cham (pp. 49-72).

“The modern university is only marginally concerned with gaining knowledge, even though the public from time to time is assured that this is still the major goal. Today’s universities are, on the one hand, **fundraising institutions, determined to receive as many research funds as possible. On the other hand, they are **publication factories**, trying to maximize their publication output. Hence, the ideal professor is a mixture of **fundraiser, project manager, and mass publisher** [...], whose main concern is measurable contribution to scientific excellence, rather than increasing our knowledge.”**



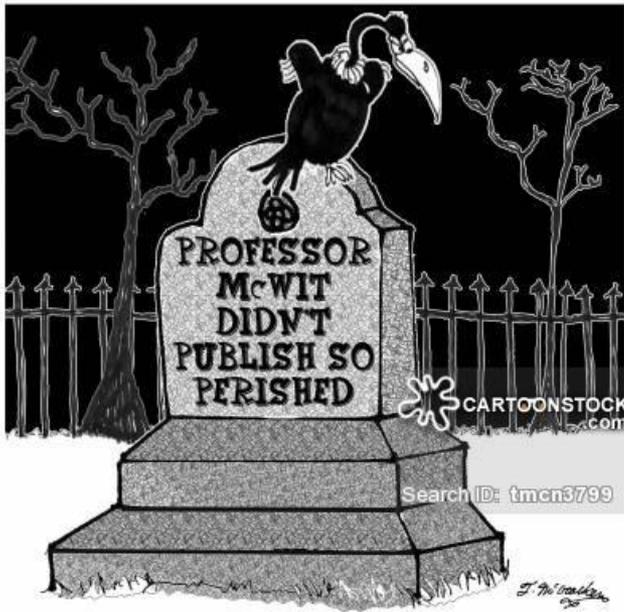
Actual situation

In today's academic world, excellence is often defined, proved and traded by using the level - both quantitative and qualitative - of scholarly research and publications realized by the staff of higher education institutions. This vision is grounded into the North American perception of academic quality, which was willingly adopted and applied by the top-ranking institutions, consequently becoming standard currency in today's globalized academic marketplace.

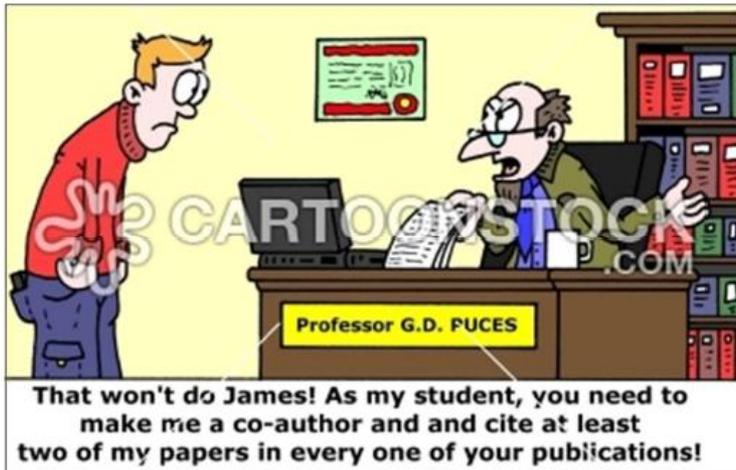
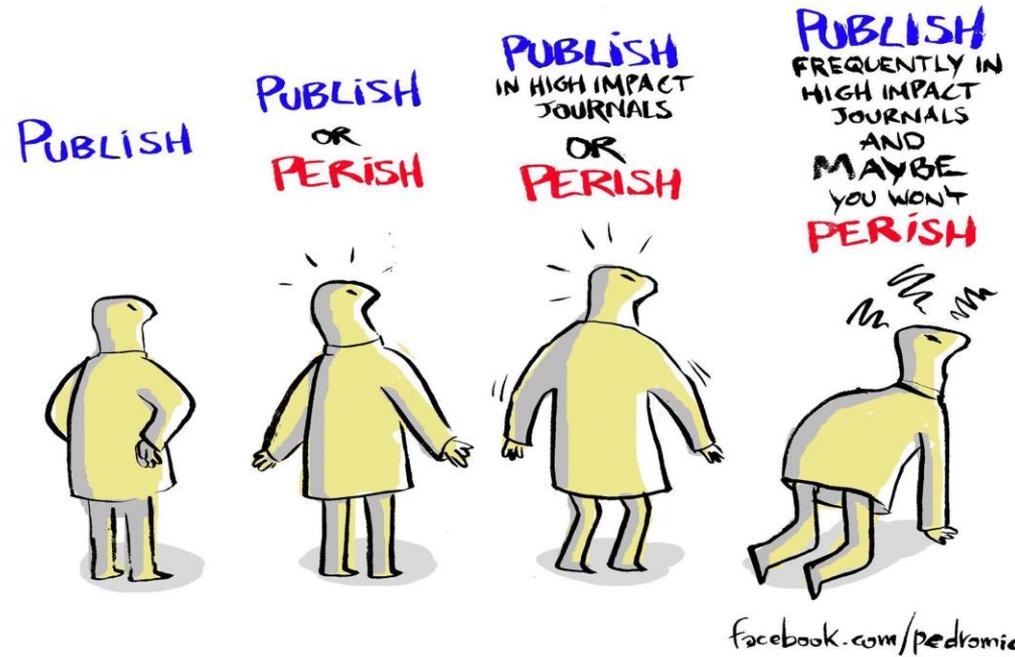


A guide to the REF for the shameless academic (Wright, 2014)

- Research Excellence Framework (REF): submit four publications from the preceding five years to a panel of experts who will then skim-read them and judge you mercilessly. Your future funding depends on their judgment.
- Cease all non-impactful activities, particularly teaching. Ideally you should abandon your students completely. At the very least you should stop responding to student emails and cancel all office hours.
- Don't write a book or extended monograph. Also, don't bother with risky, visionary or imaginative projects unless you can be absolutely certain that you will get a publication out of it. Publish only in the best known journals: Nature, Science, the American Journal of Potato Research or similarly excellent journals are good choices.
- Once you've done your research, you should develop an unhealthy obsession with impact. You shouldn't neglect your h-index – just artificially inflate it by citing yourselves 50-odd times in every paper.



THE EVOLUTION OF ACADEMIA

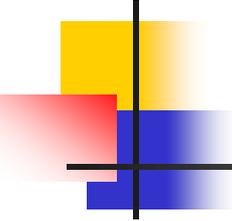


Research

- To investigate the relationship between academic excellence

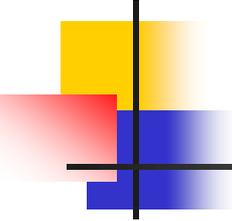
and scholarly research and publications, from the perspective of various stakeholder groups, we initiated in May 2018 a research project centered around the evolving research strategy of Montpellier Business School (MBS), located in the south of France.





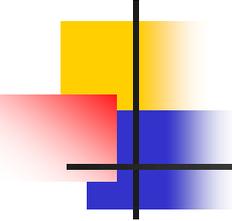
Methodology

- We collected primary data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a sample of 20 people, from each of the following categories of stakeholders: students, professors, companies.
- To avoid “politically-correct answers” the discussions took place in informal settings, without revealing the aim of the project + strict confidentiality.
- The answers and the notes regarding the “non-verbal” behavior displayed by interviewees were written down immediately after the discussion, and then manually coded by the researcher, using open and axial coding techniques.



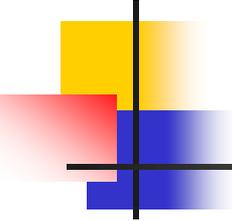
Findings

- The perception of stakeholders regarding this topic depends on their specific interests and profiles.
- Although, in principle, all stakeholders outlined the importance of scholarly research and publications for knowledge creation, professional evolution, and theoretical understanding, from a practical perspective, many interviewees – especially company representatives and students – deplored the strong focus on theoretical research that has little relevance for their professional development and applications.



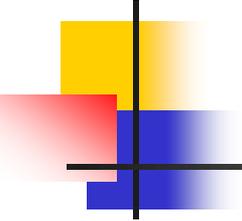
Thought-provoking findings

- Scholarly research and publication increasingly functions as a closed hierarchical system that has lost touch with the practical questions and needs of students and company managers:
 - “both teaching and research requires time and commitment, but as time and effort requirements to eventually get a good publication output have rapidly increased, good researchers can only maintain or increase their performance by reducing teaching and administrative work” (associate professor);
 - “it is difficult to work with some colleagues, as they are so specialized and have their exclusive research network” (assistant professor);
 - “many highly-ranked researchers are often unavailable and difficult to reach” (student);
 - “ideas from top research publications are difficult to implement during my internship as they are so distant from everyday organizational problems” (student);
 - “our company needs employees with solid knowledge and problem-solving skills – or many top research publications are so specialized and abstract that have no practical interest for our management or strategy” (company manager)



Discussion

- A systemic problem; difficult to challenge or change the rules of the game
- Academic staff: publish or perish; higher education institutions: publish or go bankrupt
- Among the triad of academic activities: **teaching, research and administration**, publication output has become the priority that defines academic status and regime
- **Examples:** cash prizes for publications; academic status (teaching hours, administrative burden; research budgets/funding) defined in relation to publication outcomes/objectives



Limitations

- Exploratory study
- Focus on only one higher education institution
- Limited generalizability of results
- Need for further research and forums for open discussion
- Conflicts between social logic and market logic
- **Universities become businesses: is this what we want?**

