Science audited: Indicator-based systems for research evaluation and resource allocation

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The Project

• Evaluation and governance of the public sector (Riksbankens jubileumsfond, The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences)

• PIs: Fredrik Åström & Björn Hammarfelt

• Evaluation practices
  – Systems and indicators
  – Stakeholders
  – Infrastructures

• Effects on research
  – Adaption strategies: entering the evaluation discourse
    » Publication behavior
    » Selection of projects
    » Using indicators
Performance-based Research Funding Systems at Swedish Universities (Hammarfelt et.al. 2016)

• Background: national PRFS since 2009
• Local use of PRFS at 26 Swedish HEIs
  – Great variations in terms of:
    » Levels: individual, department, faculty
    » Indicators: publication based, citation based
  – Poorly documented
  – Seldom evaluated
  – Loose connection to organizational goals
• External evaluations of candidates for academic positions in
  – Biomedicine
  – Economics
  – History

• Use of bibliometric indicators
  – Indicators as judgement devices
  – ’Citizen bibliometrics’
    » Variation in-between fields
    » Negotiating a variety of indicators, related to field practices and norms

• The valuation of publications in evaluating careers
  – Authorship
  – Publication prestige
  – Temporality of research
  – Reputation in the field
  – Boundary keeping
Effects on Research Practices and Disciplinary Norms (Hammarfelt & Haddow in press)

- Questionnaire on metrics use and publication practices among Australian and Swedish humanities scholars
  - Use of various indicators and rankings
    » In AUS 62 % of scholars, in SWE 14 %
    » In institutional policies, in CVs and applications, for general promotion of their work
  - Critical, but feeling pressure to adapt
  - Tension between disciplinary quality criteria and formalized indicators
Effects on Research Practices and Disciplinary Norms, pt 2 (Nästesjö 2017)

• Bibliometric study of, and interviews with, humanities scholars at Lund University
  – No radical shift in publication practices
  – Disciplinary differences, career stage & ’academic age’
  – Humanities scholars increasingly adapting to dominant trends in academia and research evaluation
  – Part of a re-negotiation of disciplinary norms and quality criteria
Problematising Research Evaluation Practices

Infrastructures (Åström 2016)

“a number of possible distributions of tasks and properties between hardware, software and people” (Star & Bowker, 2006, p. 232).

- Interacting systems and structures
- The stakeholders
- Problematising a distinction between evaluees, evaluators and auxiliary stakeholders
Problematizing Research Evaluation Practices, pt 2

• The indicators
  – Organizational vs disciplinary evaluation
  – In relation to organizational practices and goals, e.g.
    » The purpose of evaluation
    » Documentation and ‘quality control’
  – The competencies of the commissioning authority
  – A sense of what the indicators signify for the commissioning authority
  – Evaluation criteria vs incentive structures

• Scholarly Publishing: Communication vs Academic merit and reward
Problematizing Research Evaluation Practices, pt 3

• ‘The metric culture’
  – Evaluation criteria and the shaping of disciplines: the interplay between research practices and the creation of evaluation practices
  – (Quantitative) Evaluation criteria coming:
    » Out of external evaluation practices (e.g. national PRFS)?
    » Out of changing practices in fields/disciplines, assuming the necessity of adaption

  » The “Tension between disciplinary quality criteria and formalized indicators”
  vs
  “a re-negotiation of disciplinary norms and quality criteria”