



Recalling quality in scholarly publications

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Abstract

Defending the quality of scholarly publications strengthens the academic fabric, but requires a disengagement from the infatuation with metrics that disorientates from the academic cause.

1 Introduction

Whether publicly or privately funded (Perdicóúlis, 2014b, 2018b), the academic community has been pursuing knowledge¹ and scholarship² through formal education and systematic investigation³ since its ancient Athenian inception, through to its medieval European revival, and up to its modern embodiment (Perdicóúlis, 2018c). This righteous cause stands as a hallmark of quality, with the added onus of credibility for the human civilisation (Perdicóúlis, 2015b). However, owing to an unexpected twist⁴, academia currently has an infatuation with the popularity⁵ of publications⁶ to the detriment of quality which, in the best of cases, is purported by proxies (Perdicóúlis, 2013a).

The ‘public science paradox’ (Perdicóúlis, 2018a) is capable of alerting to the traded values, although quality is still sought in ‘organic’ or ‘local’ (i.e. low-intensity, fit-for-purpose) academic endeavours (Perdicóúlis, 2014c). By and large, decades of persistent side-focussing have managed to disorientate generations of scientists, so a ‘resistance’ question begs to be asked: what stands behind high-quality scholarly publications?

¹ Awareness through a ‘hands-on’ experience, including data, information, and understanding (Perdicóúlis, 2013b).

² i.e. learning at a high level, with communication characterised by ‘scientific rigour’ (Perdicóúlis, 2012b, 2014a).

³ This is commonly known as ‘research’, and is founded on trustworthy procedures (Perdicóúlis, 2014b,d, 2015b).

⁴ Credits to E. Garfield’s inoffensive discovery followed up by a successful business venture (Perdicóúlis, 2015a).

⁵ It is known from the wider market that popularity does not (necessarily) indicate quality (Perdicóúlis, 2013a).

⁶ Popularity is indicated by citations, which currently have the value of an academic currency (Perdicóúlis, 2012a).

2 Attitude and determination

Academic endeavours with the intent to prepare high-quality publications require two parts: (a) a long-term, cumulative personal investment of the participants, summarised as expertise⁷ and/ or experience⁸, and (b) a practical determination for the particular endeavour, evidenced in the effort the participants are effectively willing to dedicate — Figure 1.

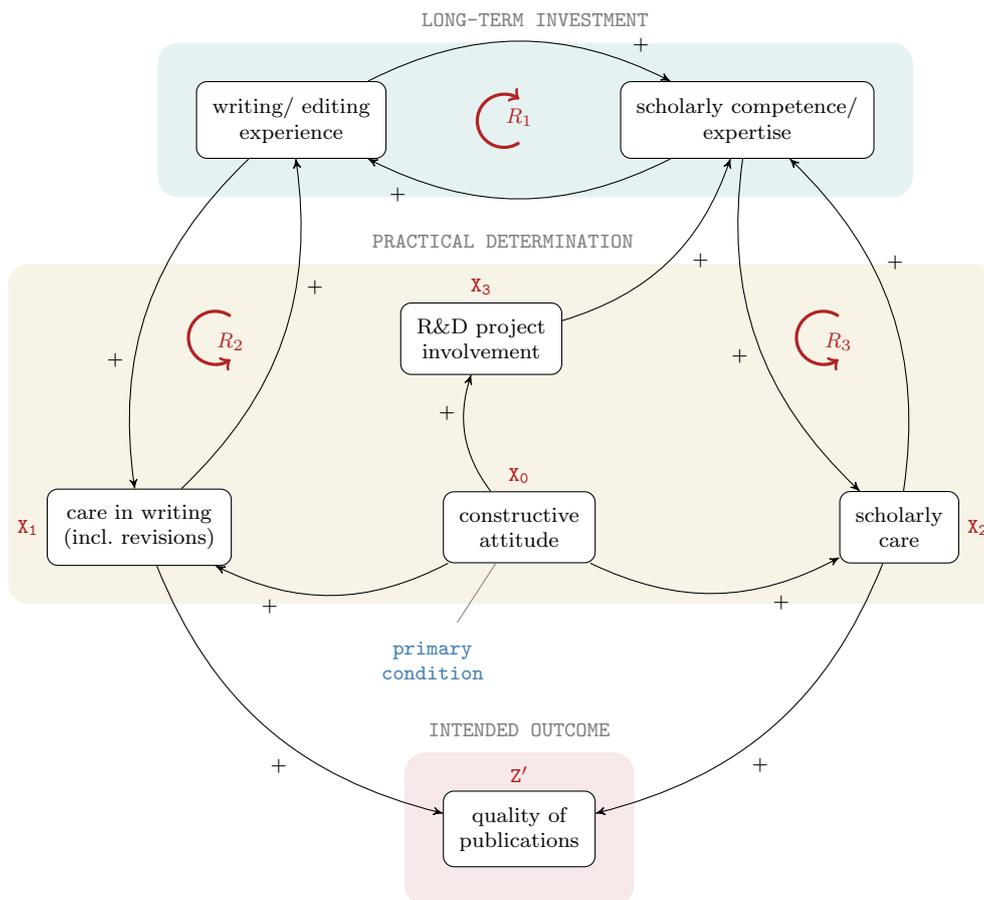


FIGURE 1 The quality of scholarly publications () depends so much on practical determination () as on long-term investment ()

The cumulative () and operational () parts interact and — in the case of *sincere* involvement, driven by a constructive attitude (X_0) — create a rewarding, enriching, and empowering situation for the participants thanks to three reinforcing feedback loops:

R_1 (OVERALL MATURITY) scholarly competence/ expertise \Leftrightarrow writing/ editing experience;

R_2 (WRITING MATURITY) care in writing (incl. revisions) \Leftrightarrow writing/ editing experience;

R_3 (SUBJECT MATTER MATURITY) scholarly care \Leftrightarrow scholarly competence/ expertise.

⁷ i.e. specialisation, knowledge in the subject matter.

⁸ i.e. involvement, practical contact.

3 Exploration

By virtue of its central position (Figure 1), the *attitude* (X_0) of the participants is a ‘primary condition’ for the conduct of the academic system, with direct results on practical matters and ramifications towards the long-term investment. The best-case scenario implies that the properly ‘primed’⁹ reinforcing loops of Figure 1 are motivated by a *constructive* attitude (X_0) and accompanied by corresponding hard work (X_1 – X_3), and thus advance everyone and everything towards ‘maturity’ — in other words, high quality.

On the contrary, a less-favourable scenario may emerge if any of the system components is neglected or downplayed, in which case the reinforced development of the loops tends to ‘decadence’ — a situation that is unpleasant and embarrassing for the participants and their institutions, a setback for science, and difficult to revert¹⁰. An attitude of negligence or indifference would have a significant responsibility in such a downfall, but even a constructive attitude alone would not be enough to revert the overall trend of a vitiated system.

4 Challenges

Re-investing in quality is a system-wide undertaking: it is a much larger task than injecting money into R&D projects, educational institutes, or hiring ‘metrics-minded’ professors for research centres. Quality is a cultural construct (Perdicoulis, 2013c), and as such it is required of every participant of the system, deep in their minds — e.g. knowledge, consciousness, and conviction about the academic mission, as well as sincerity in their motives and actions.

Resisting the trends of ephemeral harvesting (‘scientific production’) and the accompanying mindset of proxies of quality is a good start; broader education of the academics — e.g. history and evolution of the profession — is a global ‘elevator’¹¹ of the situation; a good attitude is a catalyst; and a stable financial model (Perdicoulis, 2018b) is necessary to allow scientists the peace of mind to prepare for the long-term investment, building their competences and experience. The rest is hard work — albeit rather enjoyable.

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⁹ e.g. through the long process of learning and self-investment.

¹⁰ This is largely due to the nature of reinforcing (or ‘positive’) feedback loops (Sterman, 2000, § 8.2).

¹¹ Technically, these are known as ‘leverage’ points (Meadows, 1999).

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